

This book looks at from close quarters various aspects of social, economic and cultural life of around 68 millions of our fellowmen who are considered to belong to the Scheduled Tribes. It also enlightens the readers on the varied means of their livelihood and their social organisation, religion, art and music. Several observations made in the book are the outcome of the personal experiences of the author. The present volume has been supplemented by an exhaustive list of the Scheduled Tribes in India and their geographical locations. Written in a very simple language, the book would be quite useful for students of Anthropology, Sociology, Culture as well as general readers.

One of the finest anthropologists of his time, late Nirmal Kumar Bose (1910-72), taught Anthropology and Human Geography at Calcutta University during his initial professional life. Later on, he served as the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Government of India and Director, Anthropological Survey of India. He wrote a number of books including *Cultural Anthropology*, *Hindu Samaj Gadhya*, etc. and edited *Man in India*, the well known quarterly journal published from Ranchi.

This volume has been revised and updated by C. B. Tripathi, a noted anthropologist who has also served as Deputy Commissioner for SC & ST.



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TRIBAL LIFE IN INDIA

NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE

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*India—The Land and the People*

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NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE

*Revised By*  
C.B. TRIPATHI



एकाः सूते सकलम्

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

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## Preface to the Revised Edition

I had the privilege of knowing Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose for about 20 years. He was a good friend of my *guru*, Prof. D.N. Majumdar. When I was President of Anthropology Club at Lucknow University, he delivered a lecture on Temple Architecture of Orissa at our Club in 1953. I worked under him while he held the Constitutional post of Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

I am grateful to National Book Trust, India for asking me to update this short and excellent volume. The latest Census data that were available upto the beginning of 2000 have been incorporated in this edition and Explanatory Notes given at the end of the text. In the case of certain places names have been uniformly changed, e.g., Mizo District (Mizoram), Naga Hills District (Nagaland), NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh), Mikir Hills District (Karbi Anglong District), Chitor on p. 35 (Chittaurgarh). Similarly, the names of certain tribes have been changed, e.g., Mikir in Plates 5 and 14 (Karbi), Andamanese in Plates 8 and 10 (Onge).

Many of the important tribal areas and tribal communities in India have not been dealt with in the original book. It was, however, not considered proper to tamper with the original text.

C.B. TRIPATHI









## INTRODUCTION

The pages that follow contain an account of nearly 68 millions<sup>1</sup> of our fellow men in India who are considered to belong to the Scheduled Tribes. It is a description of how they live, how they regulate their social life, and also how they try to beautify their life in a hundred different ways. Nowhere does man live by bread alone; no community is tied up with the tribulations of everyday life in such a manner that it does not find time to reach out into a world of imagination and of spiritual adventure. The dead are remembered and honoured through memorials and rituals for they are supposed to take an interest in the affairs of the living; and, thus, a continuity is established between the present and the past.

Howsoever isolated and meagre the life of a community may be, they try to make the most effective use of their natural resources in accordance with their technological equipment and social resources. They also try to protect themselves, both mentally and spiritually, by building up a world of their own, whether it be by means of art or belief. And, that world goes beyond the world of the senses. It is this that the author has tried to place before the readers, who would realise as they go through the pages of the book, the strength and resourcefulness with which tribes meet the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix II.



problems of day-to-day existence. He would also learn to respect them; but this should not lead him to a purely romantic appreciation of these free-born communities.

Many years ago, a great Arctic explorer, named Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who spent decades among the Eskimos, said that the Eskimos with their ingenuity had succeeded in surviving in an environment where Europeans would have, and actually had, perished. The same thing has been said of the Bushmen who live in the Kalahari desert in southern Africa. In our own country also, there are tribes who have survived in spite of great hardships; and we can only admire them for the quality of the culture which they have built up, though it may appear very meagre in comparison with that of their more prosperous neighbours.

But this is not all. Nearly all the tribal people of India have been in almost continuous contact with their neighbours, who live by farming and a large number of specialised manual industries. This contact goes back, at least, to the days of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; for in them there are references to tribal communities who are referred to as *Jana*. When, in his exile, Rama reached the borders of the forests of central India, the land was introduced to him as the abode of the tribal peoples, *Jana-sthana*. Even in Vedic literature, there are references to peoples who were different in physical appearance, and who worshipped strange gods, which shows that the contact between the tribes and the farming and cattle-rearing people who crowded in the more open plains, has been a continuous one over the centuries. This must have led to situations of hostility and friendliness, which eventually brought about great changes in the character and composition of Indian civilisation.

Today, when the whole of India has resolved to throw open opportunities of advancement to every citizen without reservation; when the plan is to build up prosperity by the application of science in all spheres of life, the whole complexion of the relationship between tribal and non-

tribal citizens has become revolutionised. Some of the problems which have emerged on account of a quick transition are no doubt difficult, and not likely to yield ready-made solutions. Yet, they are there; and while dealing with the life of the people in question, it will also be our purpose to refer to some of the problems which face us all today.

The following pages have, therefore, not been devoted to a presentation of a romantic picture, which generally comes to our mind when we think of the tribal people. The author has tried to be faithful to reality as far as possible; so that, when the reader reaches the end of the book, he will, at least, be mentally prepared to appreciate the situation with intelligence and sympathy, and even participate in future in the joint task of building up a new and prosperous society without the blemishes of the old.

Let us begin by asking ourselves what we mean by a tribe.

The Constitution of India recognises eighteen major languages, namely, Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Besides these, there are a large number of languages spoken by small communities; and these belong to such families as the Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan. Some, like the Onge or Jarawa (Andamanese), do not come under any known category. Speakers of such languages and dialects range from a few dozen to even six million (Census of India, 1991 Series 1, India Pt IV B (i) (b)- C Series).

According to 1991 Census there were the following 13 tribal languages/dialects each of which was spoken by more than half a million persons :

1. Bhili/Bhilodi	55,72,308
2. Santali	52,16,325
3. Gondi	21,24,852
4. Kurukh/Oraon	14,26,618

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix II.



5.	Munda/Mundari	12,75,272
6.	Bodo/Boro	12,21,881
7.	Ho	9,49,216
8.	Khasi	9,12,283
9.	Tripuri	6,94,940
10.	Garos	6,75,642
11.	Kui	6,41,662
12.	Lushai/Mizo	5,38,842
13.	Halbi	5,34,313

At the bottom, there are primitive tribes like the tribes of Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Andamanese, Jarawa, Onge, Sentinelese, Shompen) and those on the mainland, e.g., Agariya of Madhya Pradesh and Birhor of Bihar and Orissa, who have very small population and their distinct dialects.

Many of the speakers of these languages are, moreover, bilingual. But in their homes, or within their own social circles, they use the languages under which they have been enumerated.

Anthropologists who have worked among them are of opinion that they also differ from others in their social systems. They have retained their own marriage regulations; nearly all marry within their restricted local group, and are sometimes guided by their own elders or political chiefs in internal and external affairs. In other words, they form socially distinct communities in contrast to their neighbours. It is these communities who have been designated as tribes, and listed in a schedule for special treatment; so that, within a relatively short time, they can come within the mainstream of the political and economic life of India.

Even now, the distinction between them and others is vague in some ways except in the matter of language. Barring a very small fraction, there is little difference in economic life between them and their neighbouring peasant and artisan communities. The difference between our rural folk and urban classes is undoubtedly greater than that between the former and the tribal communities so far as occupations are concerned. Yet, as the tribes have, more or less, retained their separate social identity and on the

whole can be regarded as comparatively isolated and economically backward, they have been placed under the category of the Scheduled Tribes. And the number of such tribes all over India is 300.<sup>3</sup>

There are many ways in which tribes can be classified. One, as we have already said, is by language; another is by religion; a third is by the degree of isolation to which they are subject, which has led some to retain a larger proportion of their original culture than others. But, we believe, the plainest way will be to arrange them into categories based on the manner in which they primarily make their living. This classification will be followed in the succeeding chapters, while some of the major changes to which they have been subject will also be described at the same time.

After presenting a picture of the economic life of the tribes, along with their relationship with other communities, the author has tried to describe in outline their social, religious and artistic life. In regard to economic life, again, the plan is to deal separately with communities who live by hunting, fishing, gathering, *jhum* or practising slash-and-burn cultivation; cultivation with the help of animals and the plough; as nomadic cattle-keepers, artisans and labourers; and, lastly, by means of work in plantations and industries.

We shall begin, therefore, the next chapter with those who do not actually produce but depend upon nature's bounty for their maintenance.



<sup>3</sup> See Appendix I and II.





## HUNTERS, FISHERS AND GATHERERS

Many tribes and castes on the mainland of India live by hunting, fishing or gathering. But they do not depend upon these exclusively for satisfying their needs. The aboriginal inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, however, depend upon these entirely for their livelihood. They have no trade relations with others; and are so much isolated from one another that the Onge of Little Andaman do not understand the language of the Jarawa of the Great Andaman or of the inhabitants of the North Sentinel Island, all of which are close-by. Each of these groups satisfies all its needs completely with the help of local resources and exercises considerable ingenuity in maintaining themselves on these islands, although technologically they are very poorly equipped.

The Andaman islanders are small-statured, dark-coloured, kinky-haired people, with beautifully proportioned bodies. Anthropologists regard them as belonging to the Negrito race, physically akin to the Semang of the Malay Peninsula and East Sumatra, and the Aeta of the northernmost Philippine island, namely, Luzon. On the whole, the Andamanese either live near the coast where they depend principally on fishing, or deeper within the forests where there is more hunting.

There is no large game in the forests, and no carnivores

of large size. Pigs are plentiful, and their meat and fat is relished by the Andamanese. Some years ago, the Government introduced spotted deer in a few islands. They have multiplied greatly; but it is curious that the Andamanese do not hunt these animals at all. Some time ago, when two Jarawa young men were accidentally arrested by the local inhabitants and kept in detention at Port Blair for a few days, they were offered several kinds of meat. They smelt and rejected them, but when pig's meat was offered, they went into excitement.

Several years ago, when the author landed near a Jarawa communal hut, he saw within it heads of pigs which had been killed, carefully cleaned and decorated with strips of cane, and displayed conspicuously as trophies within the hut itself. This is also true of the Onge of Little Andaman. But in one communal hut of the Jarawa an antler was found which seemed to have been ground down at one end. Nothing else connected with deer was found in any of the other two Jarawa huts which were also visited.

The Andamanese seldom fish with nets. They use bows and arrows and spears for the purpose. There are coral reefs around some of the islands where the water is shallow and crystal-clear. It is easy to spot fish and turtles from their canoes in shallow waters, while turtles' eggs can be collected easily from the beaches of a few of the lonely islands. Shellfish of various kinds and crabs are also gathered for food. But it is interesting that so far as the Onge are concerned, they do not shoot birds for meat, although the bird population is not small. It has been suggested that they do not do so for fear of losing their arrows in the thick vegetation which covers the island.

So far as the arrows of the Jarawa are concerned, those which they have sometimes used against outsiders have been found to be tipped by some kind of hard wood. But they appreciate the use of iron; and on the sly try to steal bits of the metal from the cottages of those who have settled down as peasants in the jungle. It is said that they earlier



used to collect iron from the wreckages of ships flung upon the coast.

The food which the Andamanese eat by simple boiling is never enriched by salt. If meat cooked with salt is offered to them, they reject it forthwith. Honey is one of their favourite foods, and from January to March they spend a long time in gathering honey from hives. There is some kind of leaf, called *tongee*, the juice of which is mixed with saliva and besmeared over the body. This prevents the bees from stinging men who come to loot their hives.

An investigation spread over a month in December 1963 and January 1964 by the Anthropological Survey of India revealed some interesting facts about the food habits of the Onge.\* The average intake of food proved to be 2.34 pounds per man per day. Proteins consisting of pig's meat, fish, turtles, eggs, crabs and bivalves constituted 1.78 pounds (76.0%); carbohydrates consisting of root-crops and tubers, 0.50 pound (22.6%) and fruits and honey, 0.03 pound (1.4%). When food is abundant from the hunt, the Onge even consume six to seven pounds in a day, and then may go without food for a day or more until they are hungry again. They are also capable of going without food for two or three days in succession, if none is available. In this respect they are somewhat like the big carnivores of the Chhotanagpur forests.

There is another feature of their food habits which is interesting. In one of the villages studied, the number of men and women during the period under investigation, fluctuated between 16 and 60, in the second between 41 and 102. It all depended upon how many came to share the feast. There was apparently no quarrel over who should join and how the food was to be divided. Everything seemed to belong to everybody, and one could eat as much as one needed.

The Andamanese are one of the very few people in the world who use fire, but do not know how to produce it. They have, therefore, to tend the fire very carefully in a country subject to a rainfall of 150 inches, and where they live in huts thatched with leaves and grass.

The Andamanese practically have no pottery, but use containers hollowed out of wood. They make fine baskets; and now the Government have started presenting them with iron buckets, aluminium vessels and tin canisters. Axes are also left as presents for the Jarawa; and although they make themselves scarce when anybody approaches them, there is abundant proof that they make use of these presents very effectively in cutting down big trees.

We do not know very much if they preserve any food, except honey or smoked pig's fat. But during a visit to a Jarawa settlement, from which the men promptly disappeared as our boat approached it through the coral reefs, an interesting thing was discovered. Between two trees, there was a fairly long strip of cane on which about a dozen sting-rays had been hung up to dry. The intestines had been removed, while the fish had been strung through the eyes. The fish had become quite hard by drying, and the line was stretched from north to south so that the sun's rays could beat upon them in full.

Not very much is known about the Andamanese social organisation, except what has been recorded about the dwindling tribe of the Great Andamanese studied by Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown whose book was first published in 1922\*. Of course, anthropologists have information about the various sub-divisions among the tribe based on differences in language. It is also known that many of the small local groups combine in hunting and festivity; and there is also no bar to marriage between neighbouring but distinguishable local groups. The family consisting of

\* Bose, Saradindu : 'Economy of the Onge of Little Andaman', *Man in India*. Vol. 44, No. 4, 1964, pp. 298-310.

\* Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. : *The Andaman Islanders*, 1948. The Free Press, Illinois.



husband, wife and children forms the most important social unit; there is no trace of what is technically known as a clan. A few of the local groups may be said to constitute a tribe, subject to their elders, but not with any well-defined political authority.

Radcliffe-Brown has recorded : "If one person injured another, it was left to the injured one to seek vengeance if he wished any and if he dared. The only painful result of anti-social actions was loss of the esteem of others. This in itself was a punishment that the Andamanese, with their great personal vanity, would feel keenly, and it was in most instances sufficient to prevent such actions. For the rest, good order depended largely on the influence of the more prominent men and women" (p. 52).

The Andamanese love dancing, and when visitors reach Little Andaman with presents, some entertainment of this kind is offered to them. They hardly wear any clothes, except those which are now being given to them by others. A woman's garment consists of a waistband and an ornamental tuft of vegetable fibres, suspended in front. They are, however, very fond of decorating their bodies with ornamental, geometrical designs, painted with coloured earth, grey, yellow or red, mixed with fat or spittle.

We shall close with an interesting observation made by S. Bose regarding the land-man ratio among this hunting and gathering tribe of Little Andaman. The area of this island is 270 sq. miles.\* In 1964 the population of the Onge was found to be 132 plus another, perhaps, 10 or 15 more, who might have been overlooked while they were out hunting in other parts of the island. If the total is taken as 150, then the density of the Onge per square mile is 0.56 or roughly, every person has at his command 1.8 sq. miles. It was also found that the land which can support a man with food in the forested interior for nine months is sufficient for

\* The latest estimate is 282.4 sq. miles, which gives a density of 0.52 per sq. mile.

him for 12 months, if he lives on the coast, for the sea offers him a greater store of food, if he is skilled enough to utilise it. The population of this primitive tribe has, however, registered a decline. The Onge population, according to the Census Department, was 129 in 1961, 112 in 1971, 97 in 1981 and 101 (unpublished) in 1991.





## SHIFTING CULTIVATORS

Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh are all situated in the north-eastern end of India. The rainfall is heavy, being well over 100 inches annually in many places. Geologically, the mountains are of young age, and break down into soil easily; and the whole of the land is covered with a thick mantle of vegetation. In the midst of these warm, rain-drenched forests, there live a number of tribal communities who depend principally upon a rather simple form of cultivation. The same method is also in vogue among some of the tribes of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, while, outside India, it is practised in northern Myanmar, Sumatra, Borneo and New Guinea, as well as in parts of the African continent.

In areas where it is practised in India, a village community controls a certain measure of land, consisting of mountains and valleys, and puts a small part of it every year under cultivation. Ploughs and cattle are not employed, but axes or billhooks and digging sticks are the only implements used for the purpose. After winter, a portion of the hill-side or jungle is first marked off for cultivation. It is cleared by lopping off the undergrowth and branches of trees, which are allowed to dry in the sun for some time. Shortly before the rains set in, the dry leaves and bushes are set on fire. Farmers take care that the fire does not spread into the forest. When the fire dies down, the ashes are lightly spread over the ground where necessary. The fire

kills the weeds and insects, and the ashes fertilise the ground. Then the farmer walks over the field with a digging stick or billhook in hand, makes a hole in the ground, sows a few seeds, and covers it over with earth by pressing it down with his toes. As the rains come, the seeds begin to sprout, and the harvest is gathered as each crop ripens.

In Nagaland or Arunachal Pradesh, the land may thus be used for only one season or two; while in more crowded places like Orissa, it may be used for three seasons and then left for a number of years to recuperate. The period of recovery may vary from three or four to ten years; it all depends upon the needs of the farmer and the pressure of population in the locality.

This process of shifting the area of cultivation has many names. In Assam it is known as *jhum* or *jum*; in Orissa as *podu*, *dahi* or *kamana*; *penda* in Madhya Pradesh, and so on. In the English language it is described as slash-and-burn or swidden or simply as shifting cultivation. Those who practise this form of cultivation do not themselves move from place to place to form new settlements. What they do is, every family goes on adding a fresh patch of forest every year, while a patch which has been used several times is left free to recuperate. The villages themselves remain in the same place, generation after generation.

The crops which are grown in these fields vary very much from place to place. Thus, in Nagaland millets like Job's tears and cotton are grown in abundance. In the North Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam cotton, papaya and vegetables of many kinds form the principal crops. Women of the Dimasa Kachari tribe carry these in their baskets, suspended by means of a tump-line which runs across their forehead, over long distances in order to sell them in the market of Lumding. Among the Juangs of Keonjhar District in Orissa the first year's crop which is grown in a *podu* field for sale consists of sesamum (*til*). It is purchased largely by the neighbouring peasants for



extracting edible oil. Sesamum is followed in the second year by upland paddy, and then come millets of one kind or another. The second or the third year's crop is generally for home consumption. In the hills and plateaux of western Palamau District in Bihar a variety of pulse named *ram arhar* is grown copiously in fields cleared by axe and fire. This has a ready market among the neighbouring peasantry.

It is thus interesting that in all the areas referred to above, the people who practise shifting cultivation do not wholly use the produce of their land for their own consumption. The cotton of the Karbi Anglong or Nagaland, the pulses of Palamau, the vegetables and cotton of the Dimasa Kachari or of the Riang of Tripura are all meant for sale. And with the money thus received, they buy every other requirement like cloth or iron, tobacco or salt, and sugar or tea. When poorer crops like coarse paddy or millets are grown after the soil is partially exhausted, they are largely used by the farmer or his family.

There is an interesting story from Keonjhar in Orissa to illustrate how cultivation shifts from field to field, but the settlements do not. It was related to us that, after Independence, a proposal was made that the Juangs should be helped to migrate from their crowded villages like Gonasika to less crowded places. In accordance with the Government's plan, a new site was allotted to the Juangs of that village and they moved over to the new site. Houses were built; but it so happened that a fire accidentally broke out and the new settlement was reduced to ashes. The Juangs forthwith returned to the old site; for, as they said, the gods had become angry with them! This, of course, does not mean that they do not migrate at all. Indeed they do so occasionally; but this is a rare occurrence in Orissa, though perhaps not so rare among the tribes of the north-east.

It has already been said that the produce of the *jhum* fields is often meant for sale. But even this may not always suffice. It is interesting how shifting cultivation is combined with other occupations when it proves insufficient. Among

the Saora or Savara people living in the hills around Parlakimedi in Orissa, the author once came across a very poor *podu* field where there was more rock than soil. Still millets had been sown there and a young lad was keeping watch from a small shed near-by. When he was asked about his parents, we came to learn that the boy's father was employed in service in the Municipal office below the hill. Evidently he must have been fairly well paid. On further enquiry, it transpired that many of the Savaras in the neighbouring hills were encouraged (perhaps also paid) by the farmers in the plains below to set fire to the forests on the hill-tops. With the first shower of rain, the ashes are washed down and help to enrich the fields of the lowland farmers.

In this way, much of the shifting cultivation which still exists in India has become tied up with the economy of the market, i.e., with the requirements of the peasant population, of both tribal and non-tribal origin, which lives near-by and pays for goods and services in cash. Unlike the hunting and gathering of the Andamans, it has become ancillary to a larger peasant economy and lost its independent status. Yet, wherever possible, the tribal communities continue to practise it, for in many of the hillsides this is, more or less, the only practicable method of land utilisation when we consider the thin population of the area for which it is not possible to convert the hillslopes into terraced fields for growing wetland paddy.

At this stage, it would be useful to refer to two or three practices which are in vogue among the Juang or Savara tribes, or the inhabitants of Mizoram or Nagaland. Among the Juangs land is held by the village community. When new fields have to be opened up every year, the villagers gather together, and after some religious rites, proceed to measure, by means of a bamboo pole, the amount of land which has to be assigned to different families. Each family enjoys the fruits of its own labour, but the land belongs to the village.

Among the Savaras of southern Orissa a piece of land is



placed under *podu* for one year or so. Then the villagers combine and erect small walls of stone on the hillslopes. Thereafter they convert the whole of the hillslopes into a series of terraces when the ground is, of course, not too steep. Water from neighbouring streams is carefully diverted to these fields for irrigation; and thus, with great care and ingenuity, the Savaras turn into irrigated paddy fields what was opened up originally as a *podu* field.

The Mizo people have largely come under the influence of American Christian missions. The rate of literacy is very high among them; and the missionaries have also taught them better methods of using steeply-sloping land. Oranges are grown in large quantities and supplement the diet of villagers.

It would be interesting to compare some of the areas where shifting cultivation is still practised and observe the nature of problems which the people face. This will be followed by an account of how tribes in question are trying to adapt themselves to changing conditions.

A detailed survey was undertaken in 1961-63 by the Anthropological Survey of India in order to ascertain the carrying capacity of land under shifting cultivation. About 112 square miles of land in the erstwhile Mizo District of Assam, Keonjhar in Orissa and Abujhmar plateau in Bastar in Madhya Pradesh were subjected to detailed survey. The soil and rainfall vary conspicuously in these areas; but the technique of cultivation is not very different and can, in fact, be looked upon as uniform. The soil in Mizoram results from the disintegration of friable Tertiary rocks of sedimentary origin; while, both in Keonjhar and Bastar, it is largely from Archaean gneisses and schists, interspersed with veins of quartzite and igneous rocks. Some sedimentary rocks are also present in the area. But, during investigation, it was considered difficult to allow for the differences in soil between Assam and Madhya Pradesh and Orissa; so that was, more or less, ignored, and note was taken only of the variation in rainfall. This is about 130 inches annually in

Mizoram and between 50 and 60 inches in Bastar and Keonjhar.

The findings of S. Bose\* who was responsible for the work are given below in the form of a table. During his calculation, he took in only the cereals grown in the *jhum* fields and ignored supplementary sources like meat and eggs, fruits and vegetables, because of the inadequacy of records. Secondly, during the investigation, the Mizos had just collected their harvest and food was plentiful. The consumption rate was found to be as high as 3,500 calories per adult per day; and this was treated as a uniform standard to calculate the carrying capacity. Children under 12 were treated as half adults.

Table

Area & Village	Density of population per sq. mile	Carrying capacity per square mile
<b>Mizo Hills</b>		
Mampui	6.72	42.6
Sairep	19.62	32.4
<b>Bastar Dist. (M.P.)</b>		
(Abujhmar Plateau)		
Bater Bater	10.3	16.3
Gundakote	4.1	13.7
Kondakote	4.6	10.6
Dandrawada	12.2	16.7
<b>Keonjhar Dist. (Orissa)</b>		
Raidiha	11.3	23.9
Kadalibadi	80.9	27.4
Hatisila	46	22.1

It is evident from an examination of the table that although the tribes in question all live by shifting cultivation, the problems with which they are faced are very different. In Mampui, for instance, there is an abundance of

\* Bose, Saradindu : *Carrying capacity of land under shifting cultivation*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.



land, while in Sairep it is in short supply. It has been reported by Bose that as the land which can actually be put under slash-and-burn cultivation is small and the forest thin, the inhabitants of Sairep supplement their earnings by working as labourers in road-building.

In Bastar also the margin between land and population is narrow. Yet the Gonds of Abujhmar continue to live in their own way as their territory is far away from roads and markets, and they have nothing else to fall back upon except their own ingenuity in extracting food from the soil.

In contrast, the Juangs of Keonjhar are in a bad plight. At the places where the carrying capacity is no more than 24.7 per square mile, they have to feed 68 adults on an average from the same area. They are, therefore, faced by stark shortage of food, and have naturally to take recourse to several measures in order to survive. The first step is, of course, supplementing their food supply by gathering leaves, fruits and tubers from the jungle. In some seasons, they largely depend upon wild mangoes and jack-fruits for their diet. The stones of mangoes are ripped open, and the cotyledons within are crushed into flour which is mixed with other stuff while cooking. Jack-fruits in season are also most welcome; for besides the flesh, the seeds are also good food.

The second step is that when food in a village becomes scarce, some families hive off, climb to higher and more inaccessible hillslopes, where they found new villages in order to continue their accustomed way of life. Thus, a village named Panasanesa threw up a colony on the upper reaches of a neighbouring mountain, which came to be known as Upara Panasanesa (Panasanesa of the heights) in contrast to the original one which began to be designated as Tala Panasanesa (Panasanesa which is down below).

But such sites are not always available, and on account of their height and rocky character, they can hardly support all the people who are faced by shortage in their home village. So, two or three courses are open to them. Firstly,

they might hire themselves out as agricultural labourers in fields owned by others, who generally do not belong to their tribe. Secondly, they may supplement their meagre earnings by collecting and selling jungle produce in near-by markets, whether it is firewood or honey, or leaves of the *Kendu* tree which is bought by merchants for the manufacture of country cigarettes or *bidi*. Thirdly, they have to give up shifting cultivation altogether and take to the use of the plough and bullocks, as is the case with their more prosperous neighbours. But this requires some amount of initial outlay, which most Juangs can rarely afford.

In Dhenkanal District in Orissa a large number of Juangs have taken to plough cultivation, while in the uplands of Gonasika in Keonjhar they still retain the old practice. The small settlements of the Juangs in the uplands of Keonjhar are mostly inhabited by members of a single clan. But when they come down to the valleys of Dhenkanal and adopt the usual farming methods of their neighbours, the villages grow more populous, as land cannot be wasted and new problems arise.

Changes are thus taking place in communities who live by shifting cultivation. Hardly any community in either north-eastern or middle India lives by this alone. It has become an auxiliary means of support for those who have been changing over to plough cultivation or working as labourers wherever jobs are available. The produce of *jhum* or *podu* fields is often meant for the market. Thus, the more efficient productive system of the peasants in the plains is swallowing up the less efficient productive system of many tribes in India. And, as a consequence, the social system of the Hindus has also begun to exercise its influence over them, as the following example will show.

In the villages of Dhenkanal and Keonjhar where the Juangs have given up shifting cultivation and taken to the plough, there has arisen a new and rather superficial kind of demand for being regarded by others as one of the peasant castes. Nityananda Patnaik, the anthropologist who



has worked on this problem, found that they had set up a caste panchayat after the model of the trading Tailika-Vaishya or Teli and other castes. Meetings are held in the same manner; resolutions regarding internal reform are passed and the Government's attention is drawn to the need for establishing more schools and for the promotion of economic development.

Affiliation with the productive system current among the Hindu rural communities has thus led to the conversion of some sections of the Juangs into practically a new Hindu caste. It is also interesting that all the reported change has taken place without any effort on the part of the Hindus to proselytise. The source of the Baitarani river at Gonasika in Keonjhar is held sacred by the Juangs. The Hindus of Orissa have converted this into a place of pilgrimage, for the Baitarani is holy to them also. At the religious level, a bridge has thus been built, just as at the economic level, the Juangs have been deeply affected by the productive system underlying caste. A chain reaction was thus started which began at one point and gradually engulfed other aspects of life and culture. Inter-personal and inter-communal relations were recast in a new way, so that the Juangs, in spite of their distinctive identity, were absorbed as a part of the local social structure.

What has been happening to the Juangs of Orissa, however, is not what has taken place elsewhere. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, were not subject to the same kind of contact with the peasants of the Brahmaputra Valley as the Juangs had been with those of the Baitarani. Moreover, the contact of the Juangs was spread over many generations, while that of the Adi of Arunachal Pradesh or the Nagas of Nagaland with others has been recent and sudden. The results have also been different in consequence.



## PEASANTS, ARTISANS AND CASTE

The process of slow and continuous contact between the tribal communities who practised a comparatively simple form of production with peasants and artisans with greater specialisation, must have gone on for centuries. There is no doubt that the chief attraction for the tribes, when their system began to fail them, as in the case of the Juangs of Orissa, was the greater promise of food which the more advanced method held. In the previous chapter we have described how shifting cultivation can support a varying number of people per square mile under different conditions of rainfall. It would be of great interest and utility if some anthropologists or geographers could survey exactly similar areas where shifting cultivation has given place to terraced hillsides for permanent cultivation.

Among the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh fields have been terraced and ingeniously irrigated by diverting hill streams. But the Apatani, like the Newars of Nepal, use only the hoe, and not the plough or animal for cultivation. In the mountainous regions of Himachal Pradesh terraced farming is carried on with plough and bullocks. In some of these areas there are no specialised castes of artisans; in others such castes are present. It will be of great interest to investigate how the carrying capacity of land varies under these different forms of land management and



specialisation of labour. It will then perhaps be clear why our productive system exercises such an attraction when another has perhaps reached its maximum capacity.

Although such basic information is not available, we know from our specific knowledge about such tribes as the Juangs of Orissa, or the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh, or the Santals of Bihar and Bengal, how the majority of them have eventually come within the orbit of the peasant civilisation of the Hindus; and how also they have finally come to be largely classified under the categories of cultivators, agricultural labourers and workers in certain other primary types of occupation.

In the Census of 1961, 11.59 per cent among the workers belonging to the Scheduled Tribes were classified as 'Cultivators' who owned some land; 10.58 per cent were 'Agricultural Labourers' who owned no land; while 11.08 per cent were engaged in the primary occupations of mining, quarrying, forestry, gardening, fishing, hunting, rearing of livestock, etc. In the subsequent Censuses, the proportion of workers, marginal workers and non-workers amongst the Scheduled Tribe population of India was as follows :

	1971	1981	1991
Workers	38.47	42.54	42.02
Marginal Workers	—	7.26	7.28
Non-workers	61.53	50.20	50.70

The total number of workers was classified into the following categories, percent-wise :

	1971	1981	1991
1. Cultivators	57.56	54.43	54.50
2. Agricultural Labourers	33.04	32.67	32.69
3. Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting & Plantations Orchards & Allied Activities	2.35	(included in Other Workers)	2.02

(Contd.)

4. Mining & Quarrying	0.61	"	0.81
5. (a) Manufacturing, Processing, Servicing and Repair in Household Industry	1.03	1.42	1.04
(b) Other than Household Industry	1.11	(included in Other Workers)	1.98
6. Construction	0.41	"	0.83
7. Trade and Commerce	0.60	"	1.19
8. Transport, Storage and Communication	0.58	"	0.86
9. Other Services	2.71	"	4.07
10. Other Workers	—	11.48	—
	100.00	100.00	99.99

The Santals of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal, the Mundas and Oraons of Bihar, and the Gonds of Central India have largely given up their attachment to more primitive forms of production and taken to work which affiliates them with the more prosperous communities living in the neighbourhood. These tribes are thus no longer self-contained, as the primitive Andamanese fishing-and-gathering people happen to be.

Such association has naturally led to extensive changes in other fields of life as well. The languages of the Mundas, the Santals, the Oraons and the Gonds have all incorporated many words from Hindi, Bengali and Oriya, as they have taken to the use of things and processes from the more prosperous communities living near-by. Apart from languages, their social customs and religious beliefs have also become influenced to a greater or less extent.

An excellent book on Oraon religion and customs was published by the celebrated anthropologist, Sarat Chandra Roy. This tribe lives in the eastern part of Ranchi District and the adjacent districts of Orissa in the south and Madhya Pradesh in the west. The Oraons are mostly confined to their own villages, or live mixed up with such tribes as the Mundas, Kharias or Bhumijis in joint villages. They have their own system of communal organisation presided over



by hereditary secular or religious officials. Bachelors have a separate dormitory of their own, called the *Dhumkuria*, near which is the dancing-ground where men and women gather in the evening for dance and recreation.

With the passage of time, as their contact with the Hindu peasantry has become deeper, they have begun to be ashamed of the custom of men and women dancing together. The excellent youth organisation of *Dhumkuria* has become a matter of shame for them; for the more prosperous puritanistic Hindus, subject to a hundred inhibitions, look askance at the freedom and joy which was characteristic of Oraon life. During the last fifty or sixty years the Oraons have been subject to a number of puritanic social and religious movements, the ultimate sources of which have been either Hindu or Christian.\* The most important among these is known as the Tana Bhagat movement. Under its influence the Oraons of western Ranchi gave up drinking wine and eating meat. Word also went round that all land belonged to God, and it was for God to look after the daily bread of His children. Some of them gave up the practice of agriculture, let their cattle free, and retired into the forest in a spirit of absolute resignation to God. The result was naturally tragic in many ways; but, in other respects, it did lead to a conscious effort to eradicate some of the superstitious elements in their culture. During the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921 this led to some far-reaching political consequences also.

There were a number of similar revivalistic movements also among the Oraons, connected with the worship of Siva or the acceptance of the teachings of saints like Kabir. In this way several sections of the Oraons split off from their indigenous culture, and came as near Hinduism as they could. They entered the Hindu fold, not through caste, but

\* For a summary of the movements, see Bose, Nirmal Kumar : *Hindu Samajer Gadhan* (in Bengali) 1949, Viswabharati Granthalaya, 2 Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta, pp. 31-51.

through the doors thrown open to all without reservation by various forms of the Bhakti movement.

Interesting developments of a comparable nature also took place among the Mundas of Bundu and Tamar in Ranchi, which are near the centres of Vaishnava influence in the adjoining district of Manbhum. These Mundas distinguish themselves from the more 'impure' Mundas of central and western Ranchi. In their religious practices and even food habits, a large amount of influence has thus crept in from the followers of the Bhakti cult. Thus, they have given up meat; and it is interesting how this has led to curious results. Oil or fat is needed by them in food; but as no oil-presser or Teli is present in some of their villages, they have started pressing oil by manual power. Although their ploughs are drawn by bullocks, they do not harness the animals to the oil-presses which they have set up fearing that they would be equated with the Teli if they did so. For, the Teli or oil-presser occupies a lower rank than the peasant castes; and they reckon themselves as one among the peasant castes of the locality.

Many tribes in India have thus thrown off sections which have become *jatis* or castes. And one can imagine that the process goes back a long way in history. For, in the *Mahabharata*,\* we are told about non-Brahmanical communities who had entered the *varna* society under a false guise. Among the names of such communities we find the Andhra, Madra, Savara, Yavana, Kirata, Paundra and others. It was recommended that these people should be educated in the correct rules of religious and moral conduct.

All tribes which were thus incorporated in Brahmanical society were, however, not given the same status. The upper classes were given the status of Kshatriyas, perhaps after a purificatory fire-worship, when a genealogy was also prepared for them from some mythical ancestor by

\* See Bose, Nirmal Kumar : *Culture and Society in India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1967, p. 210.



unemployed Brahmans who were on the look-out for new clients. In some of the Puranas also, we read how a sect like the sun-worshipping Magas (=magi) came to India from the land of the Sakas, where the twice-born were known by the name of Maga (*Yatra vipraaha Magaakhyaaha*).

Thus, at the upper end some families or lineages were absorbed into the superior *varnas*; but the majority undoubtedly found a place in the Sudra *varna*. All of them were not cultivators or farm-labourers. Some specialised in arts like basketry or blacksmithery and the like, and were reckoned as artisan castes. Thus, the Lohra and the Asura of Chhotanagpur, who are blacksmiths, are evidently of tribal origin. Indeed they are included among the Scheduled Tribes. The Pentia Bhoi of the western districts of Orissa are quite different from other Hindu blacksmiths of Orissa. They use a pair of bellows made of the hides of cattle and worked by foot. The more orthodox Hindu castes have a hand-worked bellow, in which no cow-hide is employed, but only goat or deer skin. Among weavers, and even oil-pressers in western and northern Orissa, we find several endogamous groups who are graded into 'pure' and 'impure'. The latter rear poultry, use wine in some ceremonies, while the former do not. There are also some points of difference in the implements or methods of sizing yarn which they use, or the textile designs they produce.

What is being suggested here is that when a tribe gradually adapts itself to a local economic situation by specialisation in a particular occupation, that occupation is generally regarded as its monopoly, unless it is something like agriculture into which every unemployed person can drift. But even within agriculture some castes are regarded as truly agricultural, while others who might have found a refuge in it continue to name another as their own caste-occupation, although they might have left it long ago.

In this way, besides those who became agriculturists, some became artisans producing special types of

commodities. The brass-workers who produce grain measures and toys by the lost-wax process; the Hira potters of Assam who produce hand-made pottery, which other Hindus use for domestic purposes only and not the ceremonial ones; some weavers of western Orissa who produce special types of textiles; the Asura of Chhotanagpur who still retain the art of smelting iron in small furnaces, where the blast is furnished by foot-bellows—all of them come under the category of tribal folk who have become converted into artisan castes.

In the high Himalayan mountains there are areas designated as Scheduled Areas, namely, Lahaul and Spiti District, Kinnaur District, Pangi Tahsil and Bharmaur Sub-Tahsil in Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh, where every inhabitant is given the privileges and benefits constitutionally guaranteed to the Scheduled Tribes. Yet unlike the marginal cases described in the previous paragraph, the people of the Scheduled Area of Kinnaur, for instance, are clearly grouped into castes. Some are farmers, some are silversmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths or leather-workers, like any other caste in the valleys below; yet they are treated as 'tribes' under the Constitution. It must, however, be said in support of the Government's decision that the inhabitants of Kinnaur have largely retained the marriage customs of their earlier days, e.g., polyandry. There are temples dedicated to Siva or various *Devis* or goddesses, and even to the Buddha himself and deities worshipped under Mahayana. But these do not in any way interfere with their identity as tribal people under the Constitution. The continuance of tribal customs helps them to be marked off as a distinguishable community even within the caste system. The distinction between tribe and caste becomes very vague under the conditions described above.

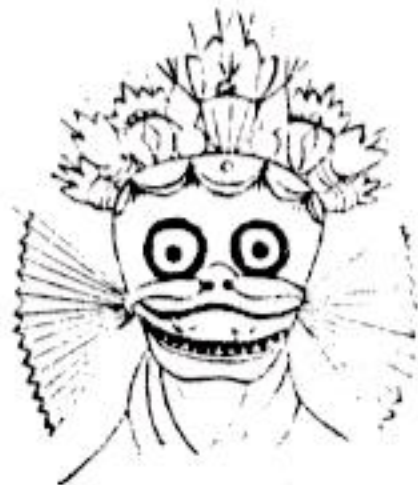
This privilege or benefit of exercising cultural autonomy which tribes continue to enjoy even after they have been fully integrated into the Hindu economic system gave to caste a resilience which helped to perpetuate it in spite of



centuries of Muslim and British rule. Castes were undoubtedly also divided into privileged and unprivileged, dominant and suppressed classes. In spite of that element of weakness, its strength lay in the monopoly which was theoretically given to incorporated communities over certain occupations, and the non-competitive orientation of the whole organisation. Caste was an organisation of differences; free at the upper end of beliefs and practices, but bound tightly at the lower economic end, which gave it almost a totalitarian character.

One can, of course, complain that such a loose, federal structure led only to the perpetuation of differences. It prevented the growth of nationhood in India and left the country politically weak. It also made for permanent economic backwardness which has kept the whole country poor. Caste may have helped communities to share one another's poverty, but never encouraged them to create prosperity.

But we have to remember that the act of sharing and of mutual assistance according to traditional rules helped the rural population of India to survive when political disturbances swept over the land. So much so that even sects like the Muslims and the Christians in rural India began to subscribe to some of the ideas associated with the caste system. And if we regard these features of the system dispassionately like historians, we begin to realise why tribes did not violently react against the lowly position assigned to them under Hindu polity, so long as that polity assured a minimum sense of security, coupled with a guarantee of cultural independence.



## NOMADIC GROUPS

In the foregoing chapter have been described in outline some of the changes to which tribal communities were subjected under the superior pressure of the more efficient productive organisation built up by the Hindus. It has been indicated how the majority became farmers or farm-labourers, while some turned to such arts and crafts or services as fitted into the local, regional scheme. There was, however, another kind of adaptation to which the present chapter will be devoted. Instead of settling down, some tribes or communities became nomadic, or itinerant artisans, economically related, but often subservient to the settled communities of peasants and artisans. It is to these nomadic or mobile groups that our attention should now be directed.

Let us begin with the Birhors of Bihar and Orissa. This tribe lives on the plateaux of Chhotanagpur, and in the neighbouring districts of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar in Orissa. In the latter place, they are known as the Makarakhiya Kúlha or the Kols who eat monkey's flesh. Indeed, they had once earned the reputation of hunting monkeys in particular, either for meat or skin, which is supposed to be good for making drums. They were even supposed to be cannibals; but there is not a shred of evidence to prove that they ever indulged in this practice. In any case, the condition in which we find them today is substantially different from



what was rumoured about them half a century ago.

The word Bir-hor means 'men of (i.e., those who belong to) the forest'. At present they live in small communities in temporary settlements on the fringes of forests, generally not far from peasant villages belonging to tribal or non-tribal folk. Their settlements consist of from half a dozen to a score or more of leaf-huts, arranged in an irregular circle in places where they choose to settle down for a few months. The huts, called *Kumba*, are conical in shape, made carefully of boughs, twigs and leaves. They are about eight to ten feet in diameter at the base and nearly seven feet high within. The open space, cleared between the huts, is used by different families for cooking. The women set up ovens there, and also scrub and clean their utensils near-by. The men also use this space, sitting down at the door of their leaf-huts while they go on working on fibres for ropes.

At one time, nearly forty years ago, it was reported by careful observers that the Birhors changed their habitation thrice in the year. In summer they sought the shade of big trees; in winter some comparatively open and sunny space was preferred, while during the rains the huts were laid on some high ground from which water drained off quickly. But a careful observation made in more recent times by an American anthropologist has shown that one particular group of Birhors changed their place even more than half a dozen times in the year. But this may, perhaps, not be representative of all Birhor groups.

It does not take long for a group of Birhors to build such a settlement. One winter, as we were travelling in Singhbhum District in Bihar, we had passed through the forest in the morning without noticing anything. But while on our way back at night, we found that a whole village of about a dozen huts had sprung up in course of the day. Dogs barked at us; and as we accosted the men who had already retired, they came out and told us that they had settled down there the same day. It was a chilly January night, and the men had hardly any cover on their bodies except thin

cotton sheets. When a friend of mine asked them in their language if they did not suffer from the cold, one of them pointed at a fire which was burning and said '*Sengel do aaingaa lijaa*' (fire is our clothing).

The chief occupation of the Birhors of today is hunting and trapping small game, and the collection of the bark of a wild creeper called *chop* or *siyali* (*Bauhinia vahlii*), which is turned into excellent cordage. The ropes are in great demand among neighbouring peasants, who purchase them for certain measures of paddy or millets. The small game, like rabbits or jungle fowl, and also medicinal herbs are sold to villagers for cash; and it is in this way that the nomadic Birhors now make their living.

In olden days the forests of Hazaribagh were full of hyenas, leopards and even tigers. But after a large amount of deforestation and shooting of wild game, the carnivorous population has substantially decreased. Consequently, at least several known groups of Birhors have now begun to maintain goats, which thrive very well in the forests. These are also sold in the weekly markets and the Birhors have substantially been able to add to their income in this way. One indirect result of this has been that the size of the particular settlements in question has grown; more families now live together than before and there is less movement from place to place.

The language of the Birhors belongs to the Mundari family; but it is perhaps closer to Santali than to Mundari itself. Each settlement consists of related families; and among the men and women, there are some who are regarded with greater respect than others. This is because of their skill or wisdom, and the group is often known to others by the name of such a leader. Thus, a group with which we had several contacts was known as Raman's group. Raman was an oldish man, who put on a shirt, and had matted hair on his head, like a Hindu ascetic. Among the neighbouring folk Raman had the reputation of being able to cure chronic diseases by means of jungle medicines.



From the point of view of economic relationship the Birhors of Hazaribagh and Orissa have thus been affiliated to the local peasant population. To all intents and purposes they have become a *jati* or caste which lives within easy reach of villages, but inside the forest. And they specialise in the production of certain commodities which are needed by the peasant folk who live near-by.

When Sarat Chandra Roy published his classical book, *The Birhors*, in 1925, he divided the Birhors into two categories, namely, the *Uthlu* or the nomadic and *Jaghi*, the settled communities. The *Jaghi* had given up their dependence on the forests to a large extent, and had taken to agriculture. I have come across such families of Birhors in a village near Ormanjhi, which itself lies on the way from Ranchi to Hazaribagh. These Birhor families of settled agriculturists were in no way distinguishable from others in the same village. Yet they continued to marry only among members of their own tribe, and had thus developed one more characteristic of caste, namely, endogamy.

The religious beliefs and rites of the Birhors are not very different from those of other Mundari groups. But in Raman's group in Hazaribagh we came across an interesting development. This group had become a little more affluent than some other groups with which we had contact; they came more frequently to towns and markets to sell small game or medicinal herbs or for the purchase of cloth, ornaments and so on. One woman in that group had even started lending money to her own tribesmen and had thus taken the place of money-lenders from the bazaar to whom those in need earlier used to go.

What struck us in this settlement was that within the jungle, a few square feet of land had been fenced off, and banners marked it as a sacred spot. Raman explained that this was the seat of the goddess Durga; and it had been fenced off so that their chickens might not enter the area and defile it. This is how Hindu ideas of purity and some of their gods or goddesses have begun to enter the religious system

of the Birhors. They have also started looking upon themselves as another Hindu *jati* or caste.

The description that has been given above of a nomadic community does not, however, represent more than one way in which inter-relationship may develop between a tribal community and the Hindu social system. Just as the Birhors have specialised, more or less, in the production of certain commodities, there have been others also who have followed an approximately similar course. A few examples from different parts of India are presented below in order to illustrate what other kinds of adaptation have taken place elsewhere.

The members of the Pentia (Bhoi) tribe of Orissa are blacksmiths by profession. They are apparently the same as the Asuras of Palamu in Bihar and the Agariya of Madhya Pradesh. They use double bellows worked by foot now and have a tradition that formerly they used to smelt iron from ores. Today they are just blacksmiths who are, however, considered lower in rank than those who use bellows worked by hand.

In both Orissa and portions of West Bengal there is a caste of brass-workers who are apparently of tribal origin. They are known as Dhokra Kamar in Bengal, and by other names elsewhere. In both West Bengal and Orissa they are itinerant artisans. They settle down in a village for several weeks, gather broken brass utensils and by means of the *cirre perdue* or lost-wax process, convert the metal into grain-measures, toys or money-boxes. These artisans are also treated as lower in rank than other brass-workers who use other techniques of working, but not the lost-wax process.

It is still more interesting that even among these brass-workers there are two endogamous groups. One of them uses bees' wax in the *cirre perdue* process, while the other uses resin from the *saal* tree (*Shorea robusta*) for the same purpose. The workmanship of the first group is more refined, while that of the second is crude in comparison. Each of these two endogamous groups looks upon itself as higher



in rank than the other! Evidently both are originally of non-Hindu origin; and each group has preserved its own technique of metal-working even after practically losing its tribal identity and becoming a caste.

The Gadia Lohar blacksmiths of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are another itinerant caste of artisans who may also be of tribal origin. They claim that their original home was in Chittaurgarh in Rajasthan, whence they took to a roving life after its fall at the hands of the Mughal rulers of Delhi. They move from place to place with their heavy and richly-decorated bullock-carts; camp in one place as long as work is available and, when there is no more, move over to another place. It is generally held that these blacksmiths are called Gadia Lohars because they move about in their carts or *gaadis*. But can it not be that the word *gaadi* has something to do with the term Agariya, which is the name of the indigenous blacksmiths of tribal origin in Madhya Pradesh? One does not know for certain.

The next example of adaptation to a complex and specialised organisation of production is furnished by cattle-keeping or shepherd tribes like the Rabari of Gujarat, the Gaddi of Himachal Pradesh or the Toda of Tamil Nadu who are included in the lists of the Scheduled Tribes of the respective States. The Rabaris are a semi-nomadic cattle-rearing people. It is curious that they also live in small conical huts, called *kubhaa*, unlike those of their neighbours, but resembling in some ways the leaf-huts of the Bihors. Some anthropologists like the late Dr. S.S. Sarkar of the University of Calcutta were of opinion that the cattle-keeping Rabaris of Kathiawar are physically very much similar to the Brahuis and other tribes of Baluchistan. Whether this is true or not is not as important as the fact that they have become a group of pastoral or semi-pastoral people in permanent economic relationship with other constituents of the local caste system.

The Todas of Tamil Nadu are a distinctive group of buffalo-breeders who have preserved their identity in a

very remarkable manner. They live in the hills of Ootacamund and their houses are half barrel-shaped in design. Their entire religious worship centres round the buffalo; and they have continued to maintain their custom of polyandry, although it has become modified to some extent in recent times. In spite of such extraordinary characteristics in their culture the Todas, to all intents and purposes, are now tied up with the economy of their neighbours. A Hindu might easily look upon them as a pastoral *jati* which has been able to preserve its cultural individuality in a very remarkable manner.

The case of the Banjaras or Lambadis of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh is also of great interest. It is said that they were originally carriers of merchandise with the aid of their pack-animals from one part of the country to another. They have their characteristic, very colourful dresses and ivory ornaments, and move about from place to place even now. Probably it was after British rule, when communications were developed all over the country that the Banjaras lost a large part of their trade, and apparently took to criminal activities. They were declared as one of the Criminal Tribes the members of which had to report themselves regularly to the nearest police station. But after Independence came, the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, was repealed in 1952 and tribes like the Banjara, Sansi and Lodha, all of whom are apparently of tribal origin, were released from their restrictions and came to be known as Denotified Tribes.

It is thus interesting how tribal folk have adapted themselves in many different ways in relation to their more settled neighbours. Those whom we have considered in this chapter have become nomads, specialising in the collection and sale of jungle produce, or as rearers of animals, or as artisans or landless labourers who move from place to place, and sell their wares or services where there is a chance of doing so. A settled population of peasants, artisans and labourers is thus accompanied, as it were, by



flying communities which surround it at the fringe, and draw upon whatever sustenance and work the settled people can offer them. And most of these communities have retained largely their separate tribal identity through rules of marriage, rituals and ceremonies, and even dress, ornaments and languages, where it has been possible to do so. Some have, however, become a part of the caste system, others have remained outside it.



## HISTORICAL SURVEY

In the last two chapters we have tried to present in broad outline a picture of how the mode of living of the tribal communities as well as their relationship with their non-tribal neighbours passed through a series of changes. The reader must have noticed that these were slow changes, brought about when small communities of tribesmen came into contact with economically more advanced people, over a long number of years. Those non-tribal folk who settled down in a tribal country had also to establish a close and friendly relationship with the latter. Sometimes they cleared forests and settled down as peaceful peasants; sometimes they served as artisans, and occasionally even as servants of the more numerous community in whose midst their lot was cast.

On their own part, again, small groups of tribal people took to new methods of cultivation and new modes of life. In course of time, some of them found a place within the caste system, as rulers or specialised producers of some commodities or merely labourers. When a place was found for any such group within a caste, they were usually assigned a lowly position. For, even when the caste-bound communities did not come as conquerors, they were conscious of the superiority of their productive system, and conceded a low position to those to whom they dared to do so. In any case, what is relevant in the present context is that



the process of contact was always on a small scale, on the local level, and also spread over several generations.

This state of affairs apparently lasted for many centuries, as long as the economic organisation of caste was viable at the rural level. But after the establishment of the British rule a set of new conditions arose. Under the pressure of British trade and commerce, agriculturists began the production of specialised cash crops, while some artisans and traders were badly hit by the introduction of manufactured goods from Britain.

The British had come at a time when the Mughal power was in decay. As a result of the weakening of government, trade had languished between one part of the country and another, as the roads became infested with marauders. So, peasants and artisans were reduced to having to depend upon the local community, while in earlier times the artisans in particular had been able to produce various kinds of luxury goods, by means of which a very large amount of gold was drawn into the country from the outside world.

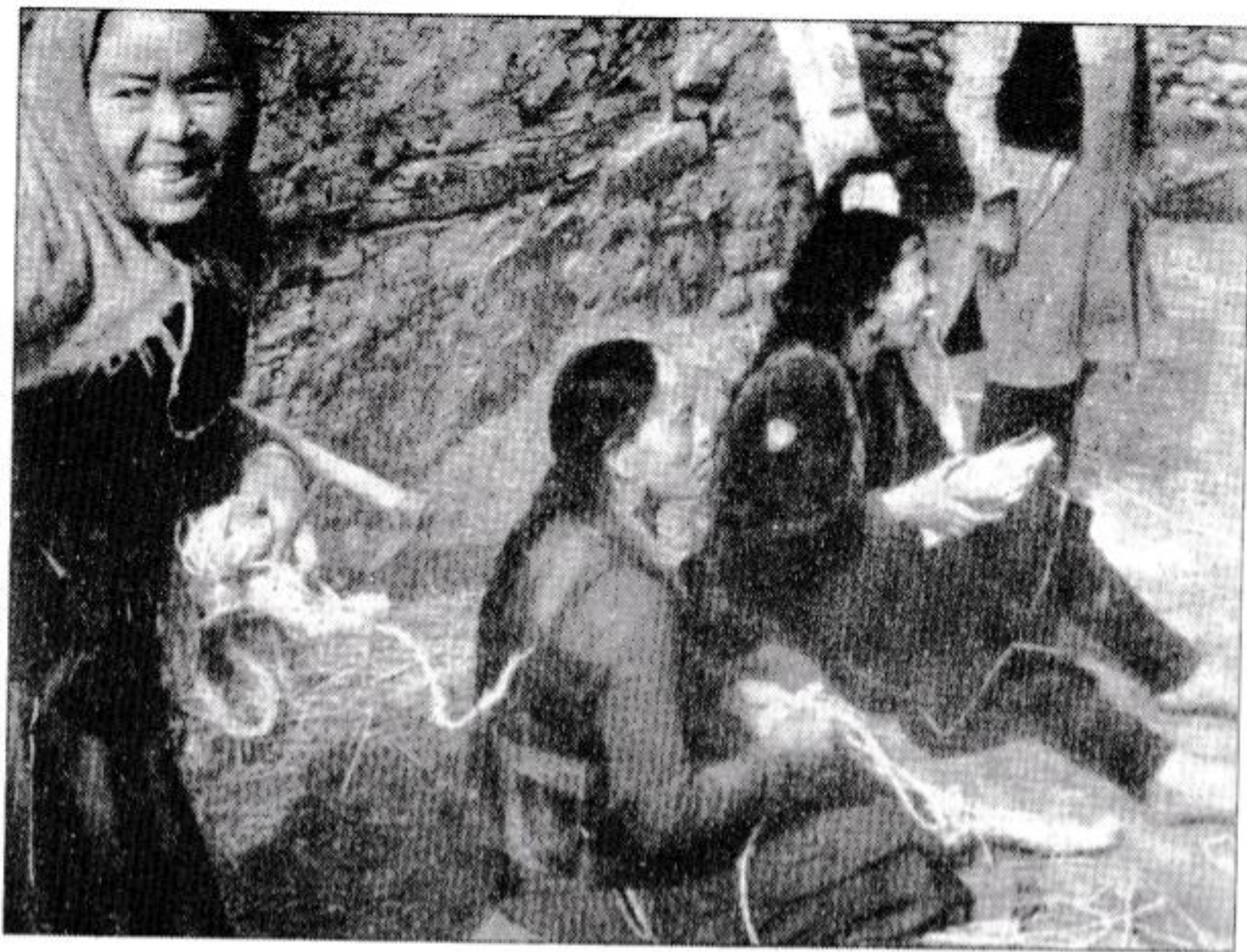
The British had come to India for trade, but they remained as rulers. With their strong arms, they brought peace to the land, and also extended a uniform system of government and education all over the country. Both the rural and the urban folk seemed to heave a sigh of relief after the misrule which had overtaken the country with the weakening of the Mughal power. And they went back once more to their work in the fields or the workshops, or took advantage of new openings which arose in the towns with the establishment of British trade and commerce, or administration. It is, however, not our purpose to describe the economic history of India. Our principal concern is to see how the life of the tribal people was affected as a consequence of that rule. Indeed it began to take an altogether new turn.

With the establishment of firm government, and the opening up of roads and communications, swarms of men from the crowded districts in the neighbouring hills and forests penetrated into the homeland of tribal people and



A Lahauli woman, Himachal Pradesh





Lahauli women making snow-shoes



A Gaddi with his flock of goats



A Gaddi Shepherd,  
Himachal Pradesh



Gaddi belles

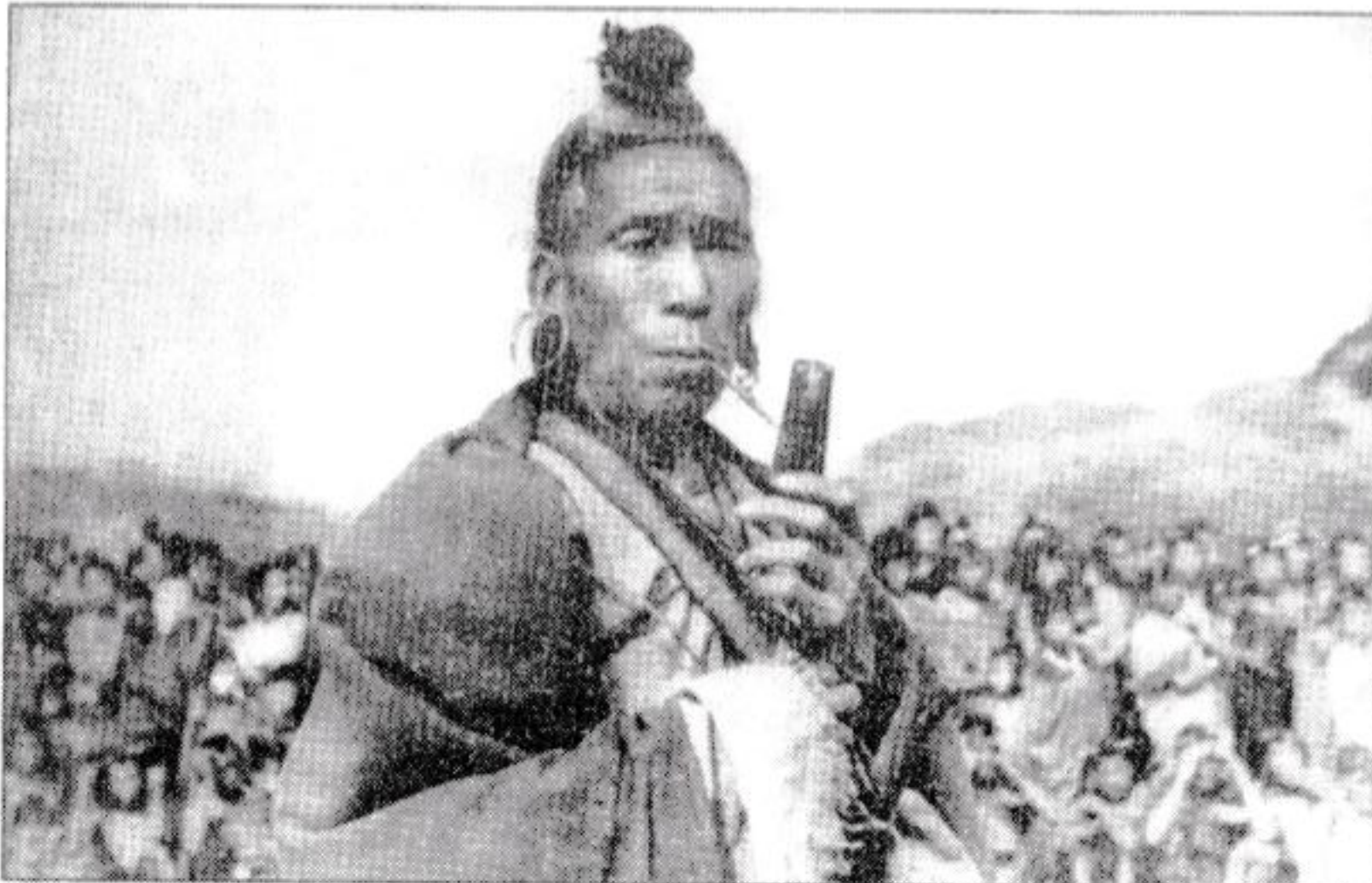




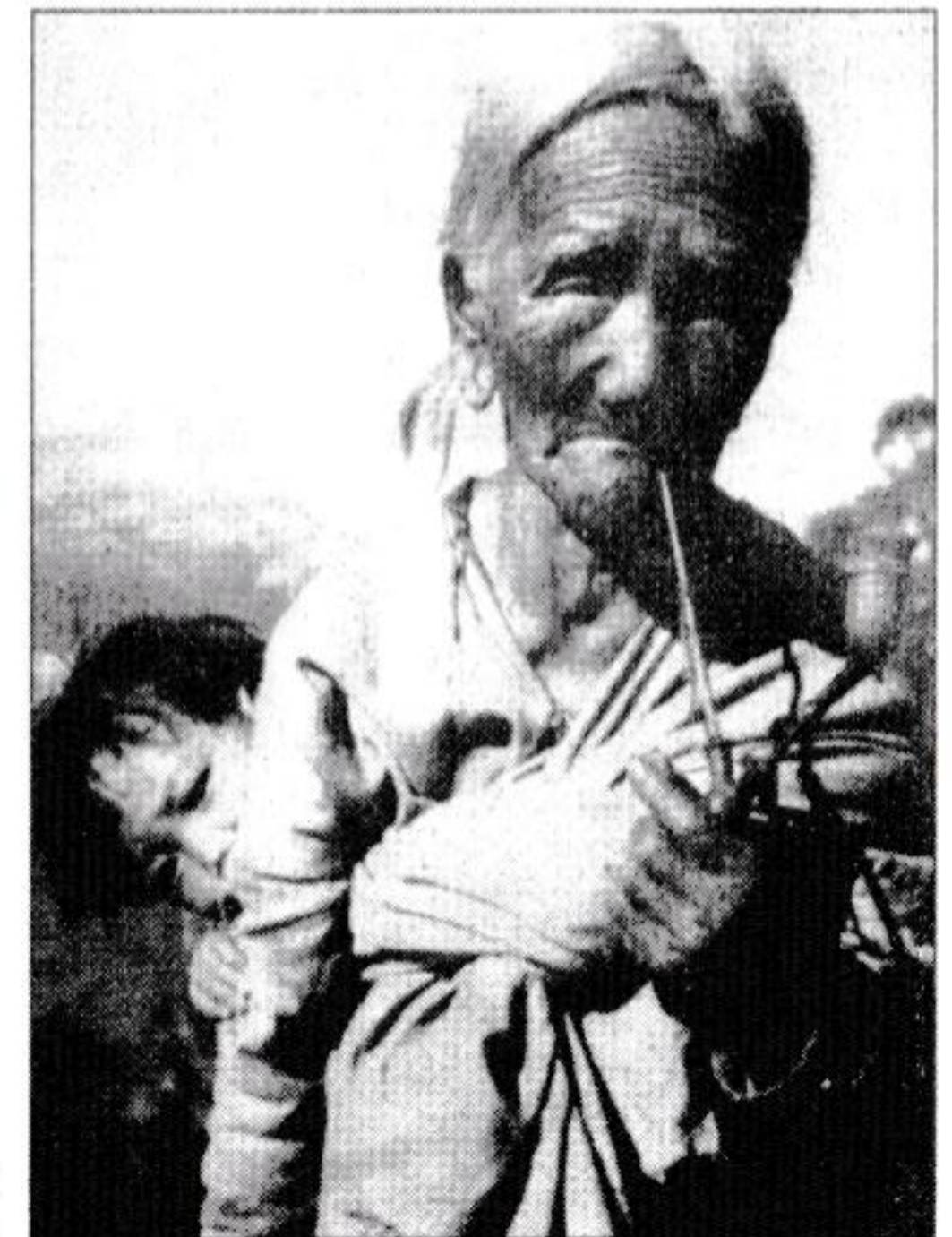
Young Aka girls, Arunachal Pradesh



Garo-Chilok woman  
ready for dance,  
Meghalaya

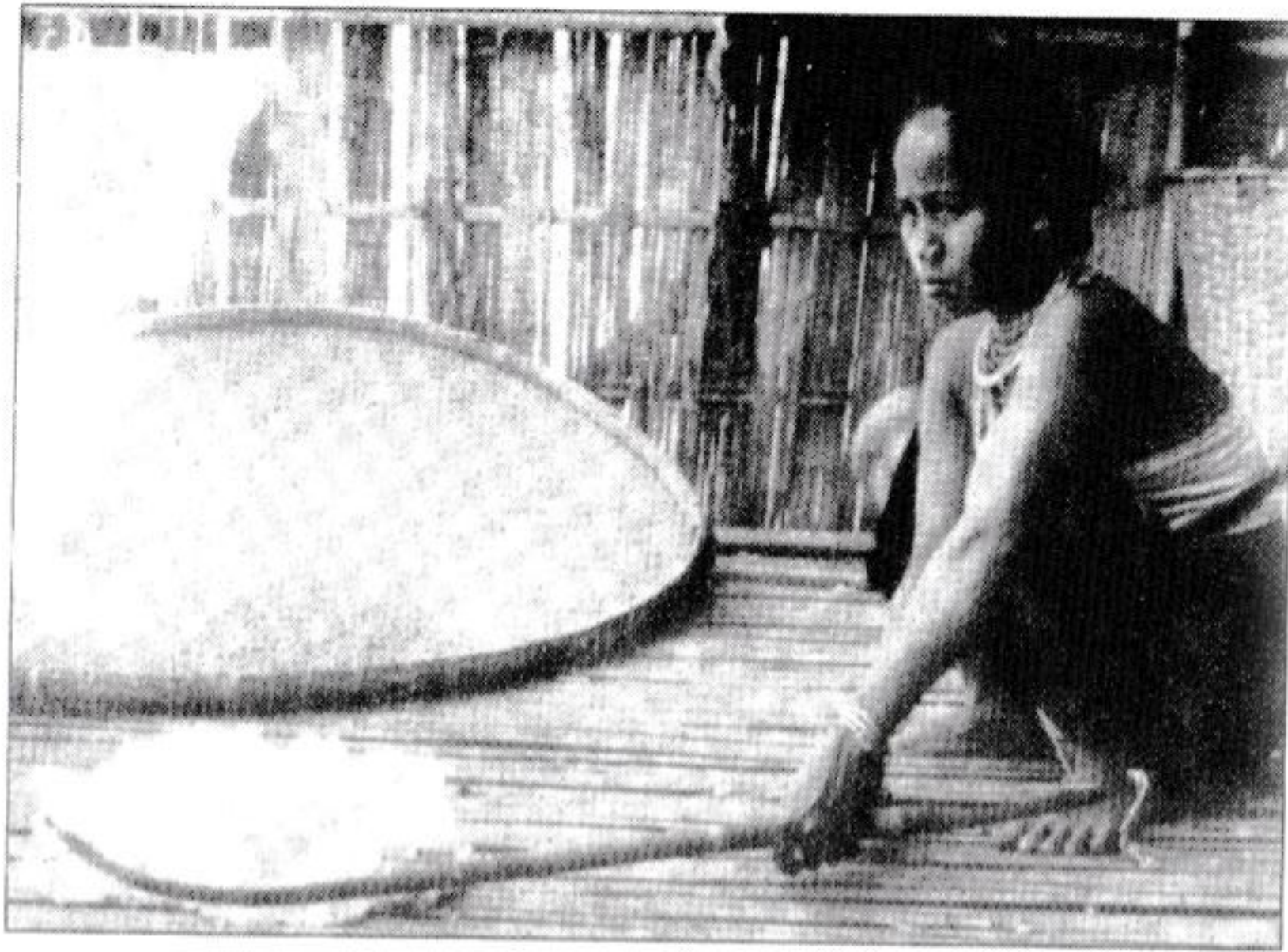


An elderly Apatani, Arunachal Pradesh



An old Mizo woman,  
Mizoram

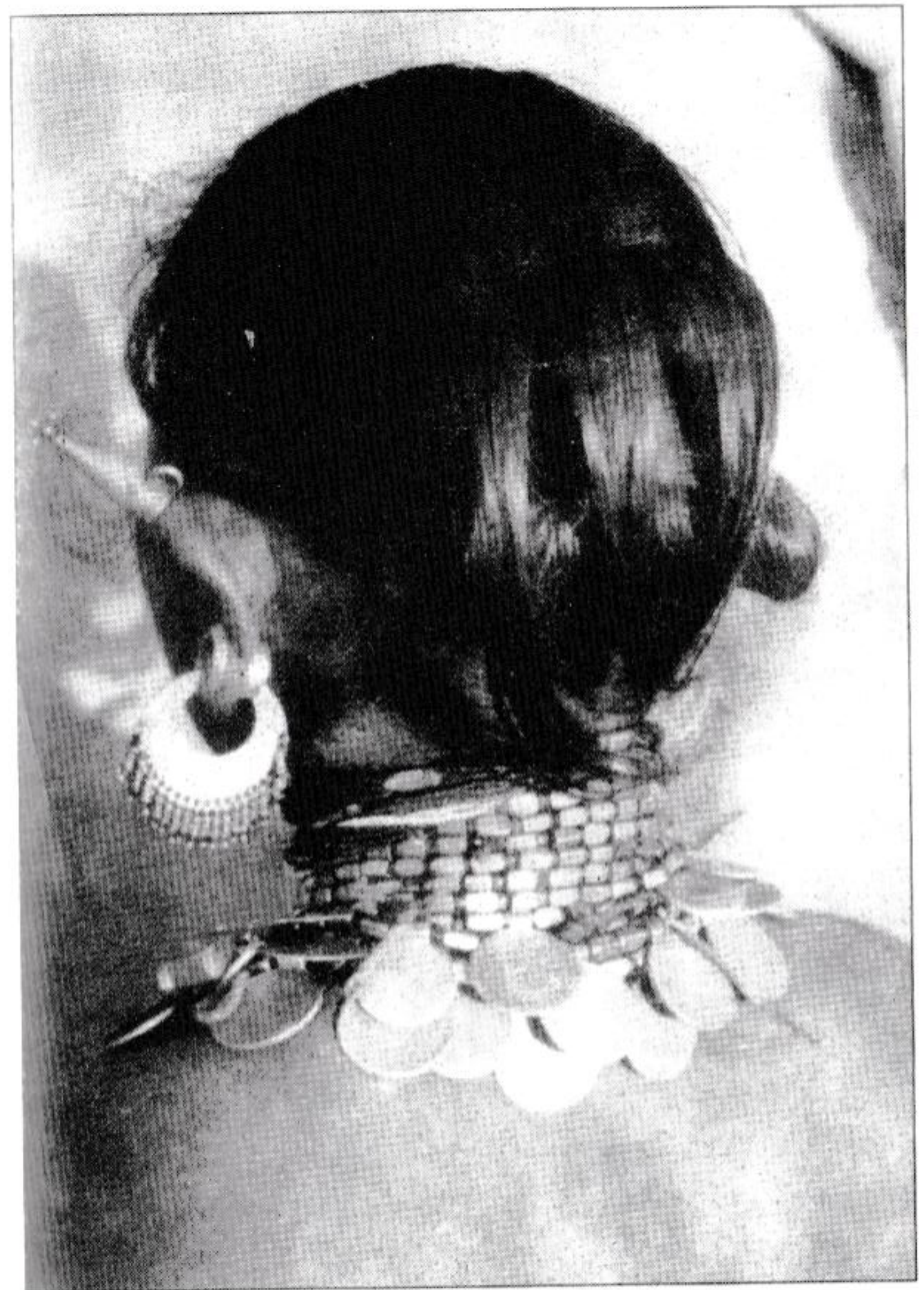




A Riang girl carding cotton, Tripura

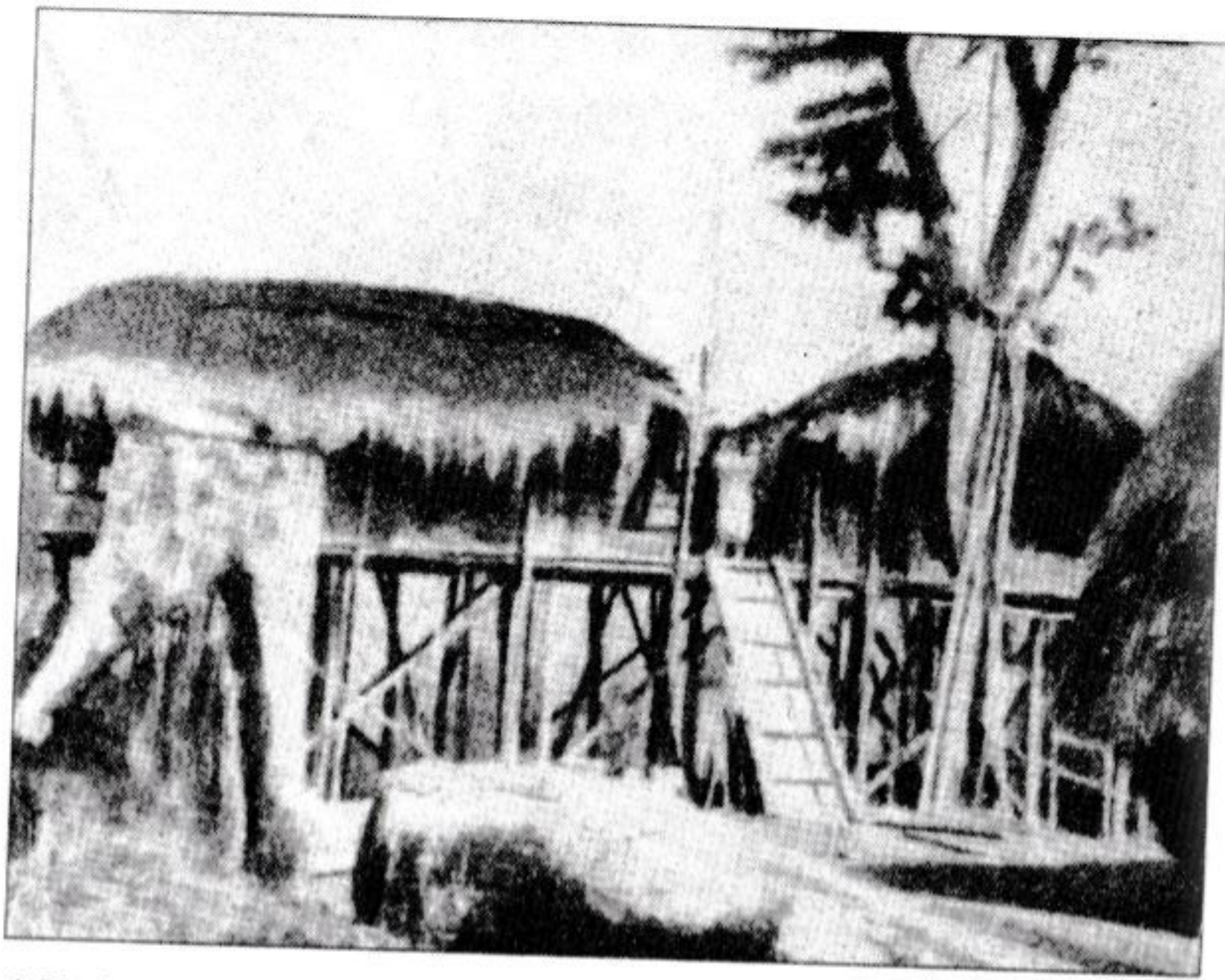


A Riang girl with her basket



Riang jewellery





A Karbi house, Assam



A Santal with his fishing net

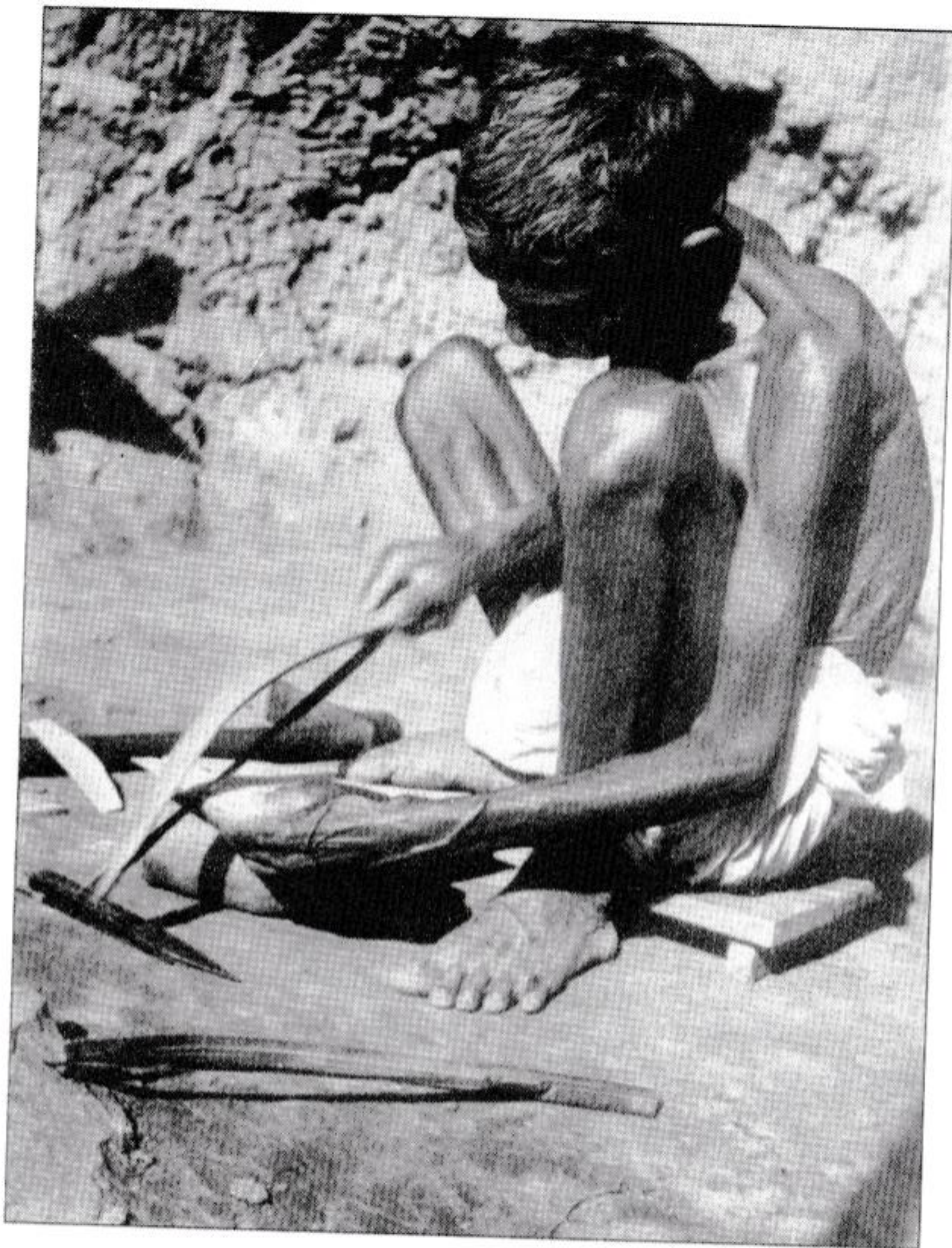


Santal women engaged in winnowing

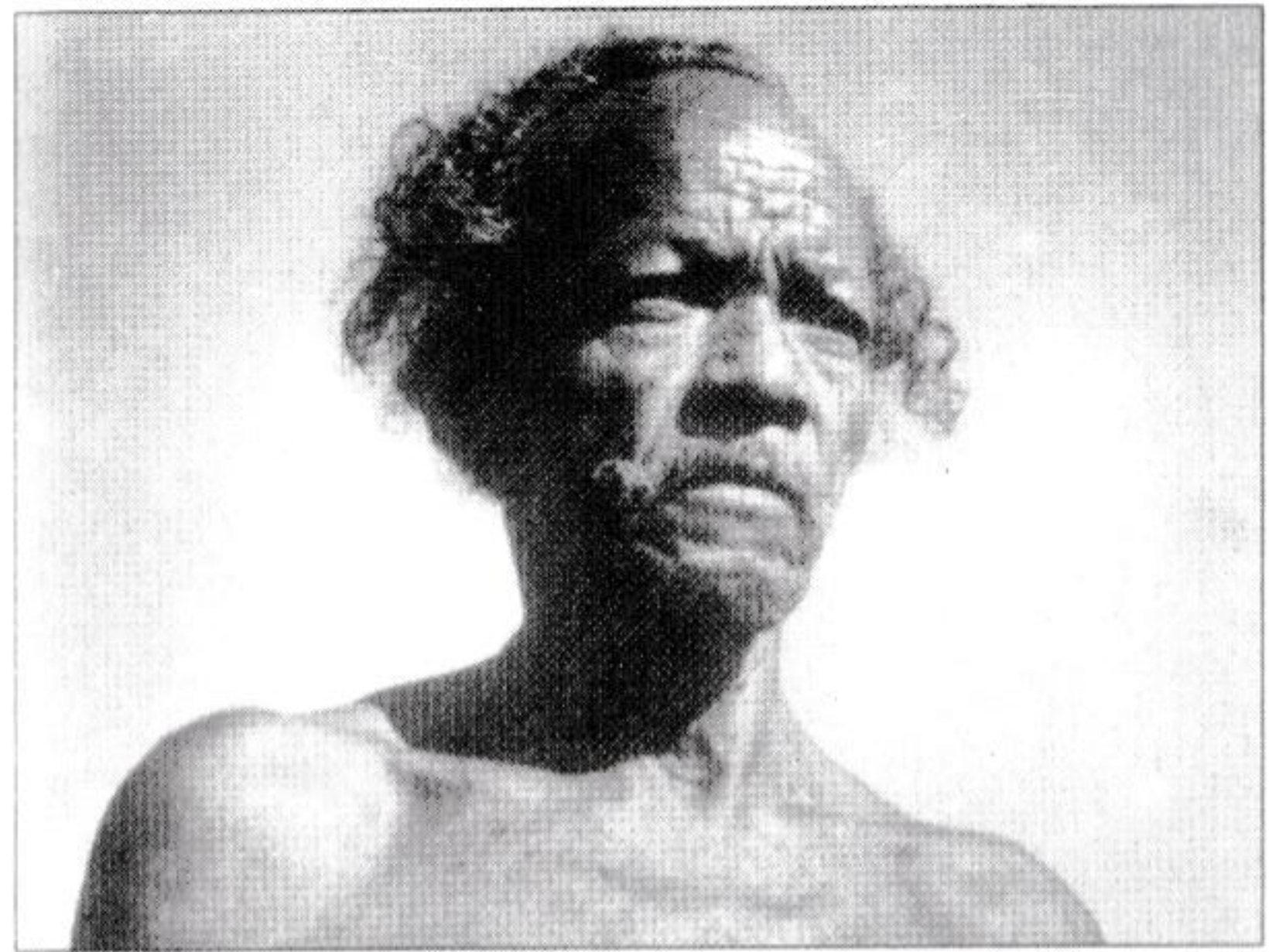


An Oraon youth, Jharkhand





A Munda making wooden comb, Jharkhand



An elderly Kandh, Orissa



A dressed up Bonda couple, Orissa

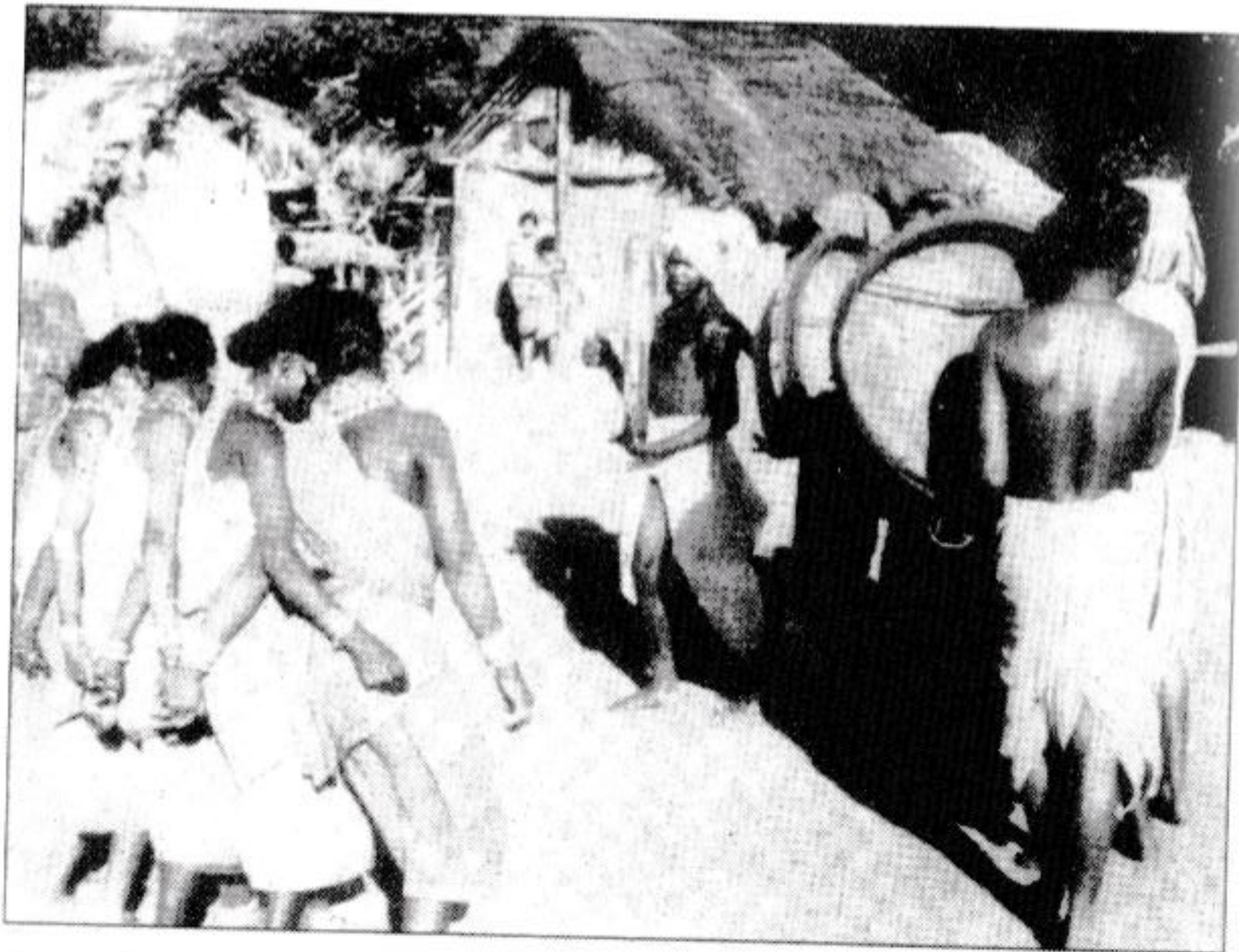




A Juang couple, Orissa



Juangs roasting meat after a hunt

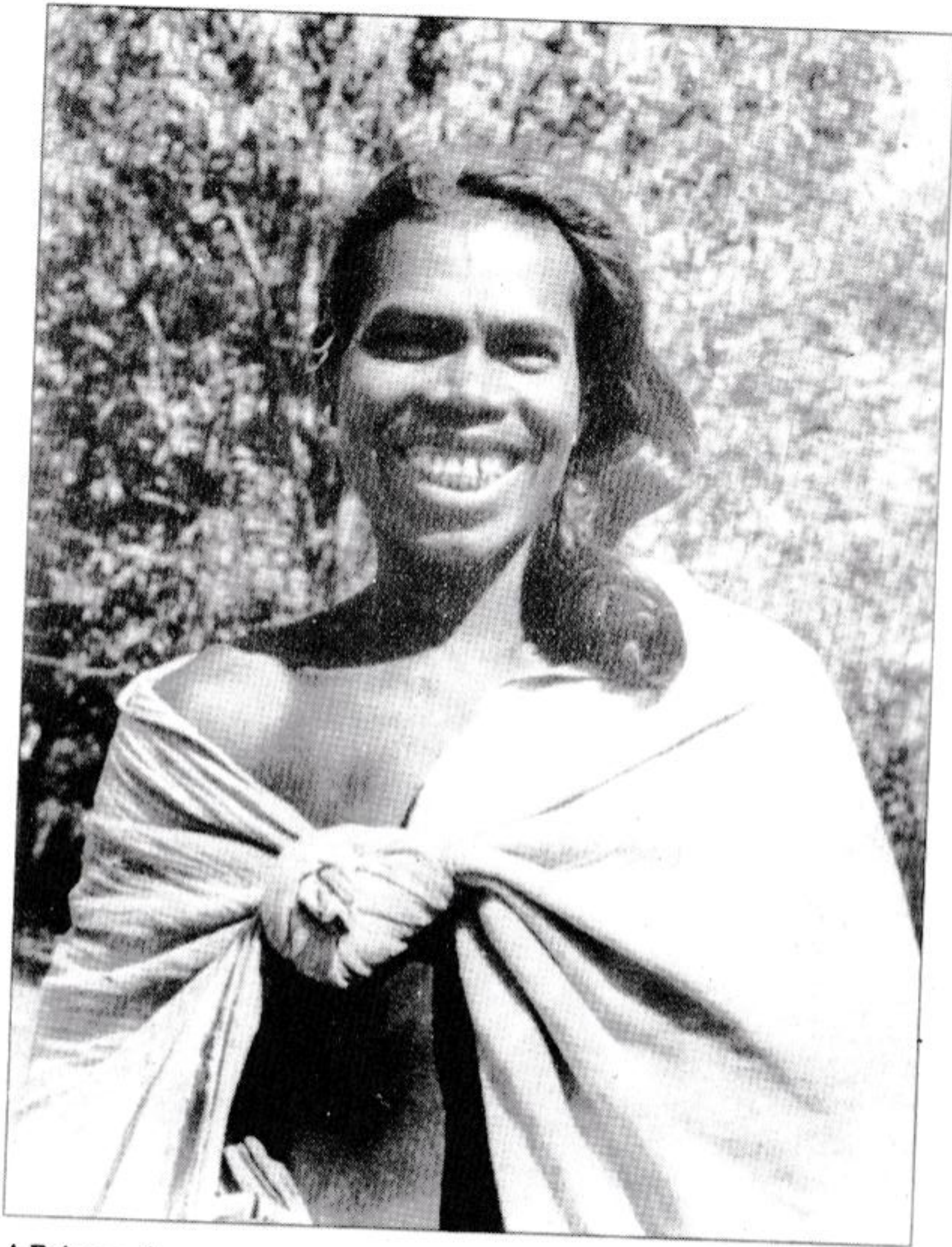


Juang dance



A Baiga carrying fuel from the jungle, Chhattisgarh



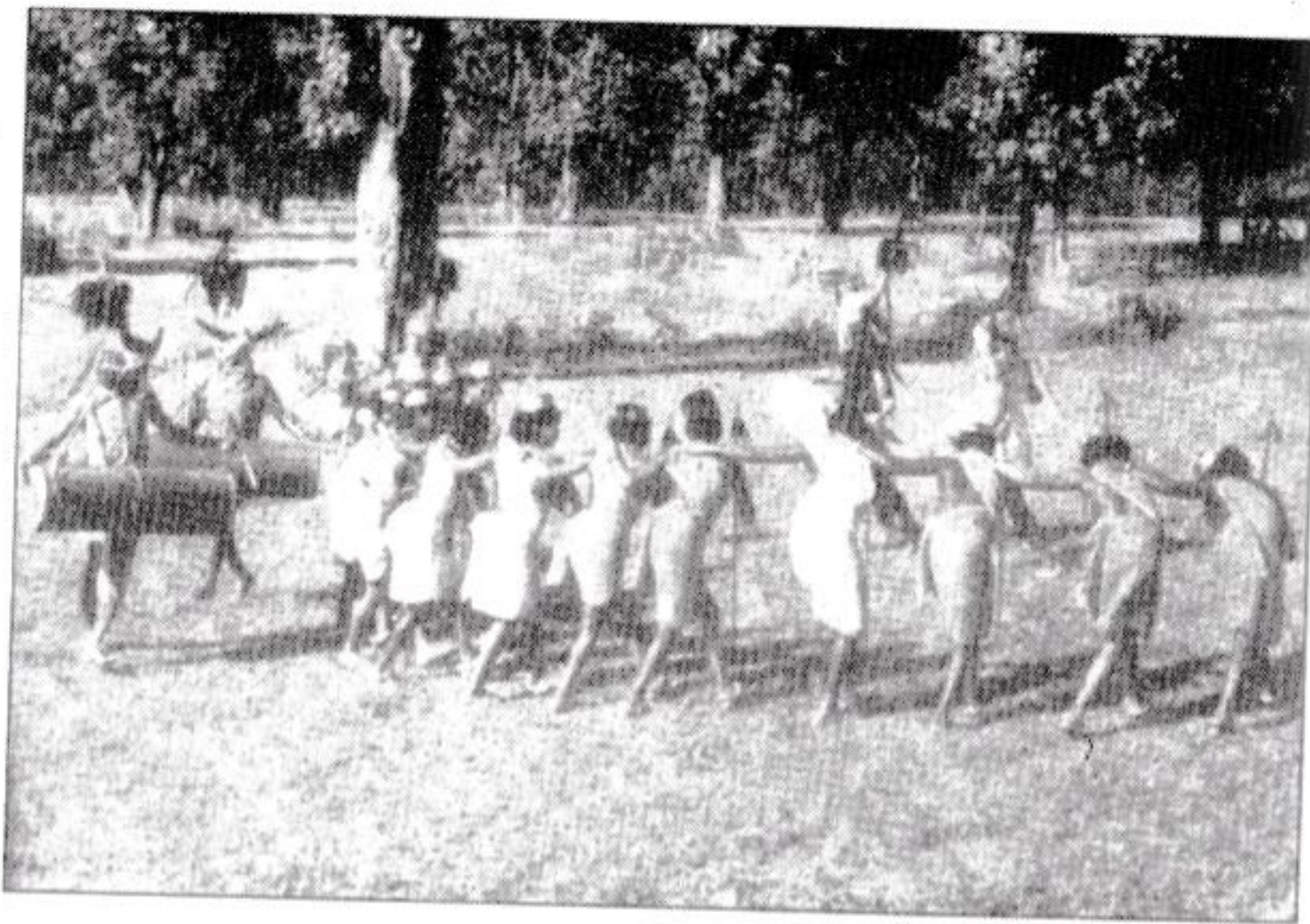


A Baiga male



A young Bison-horn Maria mother, Chhattisgarh





Bison-horn Maria dance



A Bison-horn Maria youth

established themselves permanently amidst them. This was also on a rather small scale, comparable to what had taken place before. But there was a vital difference in the quality of contact which now took place.

Not only peasants, but also small traders and money-lenders began to flock into the fastnesses which had hitherto been avoided. Let us consider, by way of example, what happened in Ranchi District in Bihar which is the homeland of the Munda and Oraon tribes. With peace established firmly, peasants from Hazaribagh, Gaya and Manbhum began to establish themselves in the lower valleys of this area. In the beginning there seemed to be enough land for all. The land was originally under Hindu *rajas*, who may or may not have been of tribal origin. They used to receive their dues either in the form of services or in kind. But as the British rule extended into these isolated regions, the *raja* had to pay to the Government his tribute in cash. And as the demands of the Government progressively increased, more and more pressure was put upon the tenant, who had also to pay in cash. The small trader who had settled down found a new opportunity of making money. He became a money-lender; and as the tribal people knew little of accounts, it was possible for him to fleece them in the most shameful way.

Another development also took place at the same time. It has already been stated that some Hindu service castes had settled down among the tribal people of Chhotanagpur. They had virtually become a part and parcel of the Munda tribal economy. But now new people came in who could not be thus absorbed into that system.

One of the systems of land tenure prevalent among the Mundas is known by the name of *Khuntkatti*. Under this, land belongs to the lineage, but the owners can extend to others the right of use. The traders and money-lenders who came in now, i.e., after the British rule, asked for land which they would till. As there seemed to be enough land and cultivation was generally extended in the forested areas, there seems to have been no objection.



Later on, the Government extended its settlement operation into these districts of Chhotanagpur; and the newcomers took advantage of it to have the land given to them for use to be registered as private, personal property. It was thus a case amounting almost to robbery when land which belonged to the lineages, or even the village commune thus passed out of the hands of the tribal folk, for their laws and customs were not known at all to the Government.

Thus, under the protection afforded by the British rule, migrants began to settle down among the tribes, perhaps in larger numbers than before. But number alone was not the chief disturbing factor. Those who came now did not depend on the sufferance of their neighbours, but upon the British Government for protection. And as alienation of land extended more and more, while the *raja's* demand went on increasing, the distress became acute, and the tribal folk rose in rebellion. The earlier relationship between the Hindu migrants who had settled permanently and the tribals was now replaced by a new one in which there was no longer any intention of establishing a symbiotic relationship, but only the naked intention of making money as quickly as possible, so long as the Government provided them with an opportunity to do so.

The philosophy underlying caste, which had an element of class embedded in it, was replaced by a naked class structure. Undoubtedly, agriculture and a more efficient utilisation of land took place now but human relationships were guided by economic considerations alone. Can it not, therefore, be said that private use of land for profit thus replaced the early system of collective ownership among the tribals as well as the symbiotic relationship which had been built up under caste?

In any case, we have already said that when the distress became acute, the tribal communities rose in rebellion. It has been estimated that over the whole of India, there were more than a hundred such risings in course of the nineteenth century and after. What is, however, significant is

that these economic revolts failed completely to develop a political edge. The only classes which could have consolidated these scattered revolts, in order to overthrow foreign rule, were the urban, western-educated, professional and bureaucratic classes. But their interest lay in an opposite direction. So that, all that happened was that these little revolts either fizzled out or were suppressed easily by a powerfully organised government. Knowingly or unknowingly, the Government made it possible for people from outside the tribal territories to come and settle there and exploit the tribesmen by taking advantage of the laws framed by itself.

As efficient businessmen the British, however, realised what was happening. And in order to offer protection to the tribes, which they could easily afford, they began to take interest in the laws and customs prevalent among this branch of their subjects, for the sake of good government. The science of anthropology has, in many parts of the world, arisen out of such a demand for the sake of efficient administration. In any case, while the suppression of uprisings was conducted with a firm hand, protective measures were also introduced in order to bring relief to the indigenous population and save them from the cruel exploitation of traders and money-lenders. It was not that the latter rendered no service to the tribesmen. Peasants had indeed extended efficient cultivation where it was absent before; traders and money-lenders had come forward to help tribal folk with credit when no other help was available. But the price paid by the tribes was heavy, as always happens when private ownership and the profit motive extend into areas where they had been absent before. We must not forget that this was the result of the extension into the jungle homes of the tribes, the economic philosophy and political organisation introduced by the British Government, which is a fact often overlooked in the history of the relationship between tribesmen and their non-tribal neighbours.

What is also interesting and significant in the present



context is that although the British Government thus became solicitous about the welfare of tribal folk and tried to restrain the rapaciousness of money-lenders and land-robbers, their intentions became suspect on quite another score. British firms had discovered that the foothills of the Himalayas were excellent for the cultivation of tea. Similarly, there were hilly areas in the southern Peninsula where coffee could be grown. But all this needed a large labour force.

The increasing population of tribal folk which suffered from the shortage of land offered a tempting field for recruitment. British companies established depots for the recruitment of indentured labour. These were in Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, where a large number of Santal, Oraon, Munda and Kharia labourers were drafted for service in the tea plantations of Assam and North Bengal. In a similar manner, when recruits for growing sugarcane in Fiji, Demerara, Mauritius and Trinidad were needed, indentured labourers from among the farmers had been recruited from the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. But these were not tribal people. Yet the process was the same. And when the tribal folks were taken to the tea gardens, and had to live under conditions verging on slavery, the British Government applied the telescope, like Nelson, to the blind eye.\* The Government was generous and solicitous about the welfare of the tribes to the extent that suited the interests of British planters. Yet, when the interests of the tribal people came into conflict with those of the trader and the money-lender, they went far

\* About 1874, Sashipada Banerjee started a periodical named *Bharat Samajibee* (Indian Labourer), and he was also responsible for the first organisation of labour in India, in which he was helped by Dwarkanath Ganguli, Krishna Kumar Mitra and others. A preacher of the Brahmo Samaj, named Ram Kumar Vidyaratna, entered the tea plantations of Assam and after collecting intimate information about indentured labour, returned to publish a book entitled *Slave Trade in Assam*. (Bose, Nirmal Kumar : *Modern Bengal*, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 67-68).

enough in order to offer protection. And this was naturally for the sake of maintaining the reputation of the Government for even-handed justice and for the promotion of economic progress in the country.

It is thus evident that the attitude of the British Government was a mixed one, so far as the interests of the tribal people were concerned. A major shift in the relationship of the tribal folk with their Hindu neighbours had been the unwitting result of peace and the good governance of the British. As we have said already, it threw open the doors of tribal areas to settlement by a band of people who came in only for making money under the shadow and protection of the British rule. This was a condition significantly different from the state when, in earlier ages, Hindus and tribals came into confrontation with each other, and could survive only by mutual sufferance, and not by means of protection offered by a third force.

A significant change has taken place in the life of the tribal people after Independence. This has, firstly, been due to planned and comparatively rapid industrial development, and secondly, because of the acquisition of new political rights through adult franchise. Both have altered the relationship of the tribal people with their neighbours; and we shall close this chapter with a brief outline of what has been taking place recently.

Since Independence there has been a marked extension of roads all over India. Motor vehicles are now in extensive use; with the result that rural people who did not mind covering twenty to forty miles on foot, are now becoming habituated to the use of public motor transport even for much shorter distances. This, moreover, brings them into frequent contact with townsmen, and even with members of other tribes in a way that never happened before. Moreover, some of our borders, as in Arunachal Pradesh in the east or in Kinnaur, Lahaul or Spiti in the north-west, have to be guarded carefully by the armed forces. There is some amount of troop movement, and motor vehicles of several



kinds, including bulldozers and other road-building equipment, have become a common sight where they were never heard of before.

A few years ago, I interviewed a fairly large number of tribal students in some schools and colleges in Arunachal Pradesh. When I asked them what they would like to become after they left the school, the majority of senior students in one place said that they would like to join the Army. The second choice was for Civil Services; but practically none voted for an educationist's or a scientist's job. These had obviously no attraction for them, while the Army, with its shining brass and clean clothes, not only offered them high prestige but also the opportunity of seeing the wide world.

In parts of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh the scene is, however, different from what has been described regarding the frontiers of our country. These States have a large reserve of minerals of many kinds as well as of hydro-electric power. Mines and industries had been opened during the 1950s and 1960s in places like Ranchi, Rourkela, Bhilai or Bailadila. Earlier also industries had been established in areas predominantly inhabited by tribal communities, as in Jamshedpur or in the copper belt of Singhbhum. West Bengal and Bihar had developed coal-mining for over a century in the past. But when these had been founded, labourers were largely drawn from the local neighbourhood, specially when the labour needed was of the unskilled or semi-skilled variety. The workers in such industries were mostly people who did not cut asunder their ties with agriculture. The total number of workers was also small compared to the demands of industries which are growing up in India today.

When such is the state of affairs and the newly established industries have to start working as quickly as possible, large contingents of workmen are recruited from wherever they are available. Labourers from Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, eastern Madhya Pradesh or Tamil Nadu have

been brought into the industries of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, for there was no time to wait until the local rural folk were prepared for the new types of work.

There is another cause for discontent among displaced agriculturists when an industry is established in their midst. It is quite true that when agricultural land is thus taken away, compensation on a fairly generous scale is paid to the displaced persons. But adequate measures are not always taken to settle them elsewhere as farmers, or as trained workmen in industries. What they need more than money is work, and when this is not available easily, the compensation which they receive is often used up in order to meet their day-to-day needs. Discontent naturally grows; but what is significant is that it is easier to organise and give a political edge to this discontent, as the people concerned come from a compact well-defined area.

An additional source of dissatisfaction and tension arises out of the relationship which the tribal people have with the Forest Department of the Government. With the increase in population and because everyone seems to seek security in agriculture, the forests of our country have become dangerously thinned. In many States, precipitation has been affected, while whatever rain falls tends to wash away the rich top-layers of soil to the detriment of agriculture in the area. The Forest Department is naturally anxious to relieve this pressure and extend its activities, as far as practicable, in the interests of the country as a whole. It restricts the wild and unplanned extension of cultivation within the confines of the forests; fences off new plantations in order to prevent the depredation of cattle, goats and sheep, and thus comes into conflict with the immediate short-term interests of the tribal people. The latter think there has been an encroachment on their right to use forest land and they often defy the barriers set up by the Forest Department, while their animals are encouraged to break through fences, and thus seriously interfere with the growth of new plantations.



The tribal people have often to do without the leadership of wise and well-informed people. Indeed, with the co-operation of the Forest Department itself, the latter can help to find work for the tribal communities within the forests themselves. Thus, tribal folk can be employed to raise forests on monthly wages and even be given certain limited rights on the produce by the Department itself. Cultivation can be regulated and restricted to areas without doing any harm to the growth of new plantations; and new small-scale industries can also be built up on the basis of forest products.

Unfortunately, as such well-informed leadership is conspicuous by its absence, and while the Forest Department itself tries to expand its activities in the manner described above, it fails; firstly, because of the lack of co-operation from public leaders, and secondly, from a shortage of well-trained field staff of its own. The relationship of the Forest Department with the tribal people has thus been reduced to one of a punitive nature only. But this need not be so at all. It can be remedied if a wise local leadership offers better education and organisation, and with the help of the Forest Department plans the most efficient utilisation of land which would ultimately be to the permanent advantage of the people as a whole, whether tribal or non-tribal, agriculturist or otherwise.

We have described the various conditions which have led to an increase in discontent among the tribal communities of India after the establishment of the Republic. Contacts are no longer slow or on a small scale between them and their neighbours. They are swift as well as massive. Political consciousness is also on the increase; and one of the immediate results is that the tribal people have been developing the idea that their 'homeland' is coming increasingly under the domination of 'aliens'. Rightly or wrongly, the numerous tribal communities react as if their very existence has become threatened. They should, therefore, all combine in order to exercise their rights. There is a fear

also of being swept away if they are lumped up with the rest of the citizens of India in a common organisation. The tribes have tried of late to reaffirm their separate identity. And in trying to do so, they sink the differences which exist between, say, Munda and Oraon, between one Naga tribe and another, between Christian and non-Christian, between tribal townsmen and their rural brethren. A desire for a kind of 'nationalistic' unification has thus arisen; and this has been particularly accentuated by adult franchise, in the absence of professional or territorial organisations which ought to have been built up in place of the present identities on the basis of language, tribe, caste or sect.

This attempt at nationalistic unification may, in a sense, be looked upon as a step in the preparation of the tribes for taking a due share in the economic and political developments taking place in the country. As such, it can be regarded as a step towards modernisation, though somewhat faulty in character. The weakness of such a step lies in its possible drift towards sectionalism if it is guided by unwise counsel. When one community begins to agitate for its own share of profits while denying the same advantage to others, who have got the same occupation and make equal demands, it leads eventually to the weakening of national solidarity rather than its strengthening.







## SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Human beings do not live alone; and in order to meet their needs of food and shelter, companionship and love, recreation and play, they form into associations and build institutions through which such needs are satisfied. We have already described how the tribal people of India make their living; and also how, in course of time, the population increased, the resources dwindled while their own demands also expanded. As a result, the institutions, or arrangements for the distribution of both economic and political power between groups or classes, have also changed all the time. The membership of such associations may also go on changing all the while. As a matter of fact, at no point of time is there perfect accord between human needs and the organisational apparatus designed for meeting those needs. Hence, if we try to describe the social institutions of the tribal communities of India, we might be led either to describe certain lifeless abstractions or present a static picture, which may be true at a particular moment of time, but would hardly represent the changes to which both men and institutions are subject all through their history. For a more correct picture, one may describe instead the dynamic equilibrium which obtains between changing human needs and changing institutions over a selected span of time. But an attempt of this kind within the compass of a brief chapter in an introductory book may lead more to confusion than to

clarity. We shall, therefore, desist from such an attempt.

In the previous chapters, we have indicated how the life of tribal communities was altered as a result of confrontation with more populous communities practising more efficient methods of production. Interaction between the two sets of people developed and, as a result, the structure and function of the institutions of each group also became modified.

It would not be our purpose in the present chapter to describe in detail the evolution of tribal life under specific historical conditions. Our purpose is simpler. We shall try to describe some of the broader aspects of the social structure of a few of these communities, by way of illustration. Where possible, the changes to which they have been subject, will also be indicated in brief.

It should be stated at the beginning that, as a rule, tribal people live in smaller communities than the peasants and artisans of the plains. There are, however, exceptions as in the case of the warring communities of north-eastern India, as they try to seek safety and security in numbers. But, apart from such cases where political leadership is inevitable, there are quite a few small communities which have no formal political heads. There may be a group of elders, or even some persons who may not be formally chosen and who exercise leadership because others lean upon them for their personal qualities.

Thus, in contrast to the people of the plains, the tribal settlements may appear to be small in size, except under some extraordinary circumstances: often without very much of formal political leadership; making small-scale, intimate associations to serve purposes for which plainsmen often build up highly specialised institutions. This sweeping generalisation does not, however, do adequate justice to either the tribal people or their neighbours of the plains. Yet one might bear in mind the broad distinctions between them even while studying some of their particular institutions.

The first institution which one should name is, of course,



There are a few more elements in the family life of tribal communities to which attention should be drawn. Young men and women may choose their own mates; but this can also be the responsibility of parents. When a bride is selected, a compensation has to be paid to her parents, as they are on the point of losing a working hand in the family. Among a few tribes, the so-called 'bride-price' may be very high, and may entail an amount of hard labour before one can successfully accumulate the necessary funds. There are three ways in which the difficulty can be overcome. The bridegroom may elope with his chosen bride in the hope of securing the approval of the elders concerned later on. Or, he may serve in the house of his prospective father-in-law as a labourer and, thus, in the course of a few years, earn his right to the hand of the daughter. Another possibility is the arrangement of two marriages simultaneously, when the sister of the bridegroom is married to the brother of the bride. In such cases, the dues may be largely written off against each other.

Marriages can be of long or of short duration. Divorce or separation is not uncommon; marriages of widows and of divorced men and women may be quite frequent. So, the partnership of men and women in a family is of a loose nature than in an orthodox Hindu home. Yet there is no reason to believe that the emotional relationship between husband and wife in any tribal society suffers in quality on that account.

Next to the family comes the clan. The clan is composed of a number of families, often bearing a common designation, and which believe that they have all sprung from a common ancestor. Many totemistic clans consider a particular animal, bird, fish, plant or even an inanimate object like salt to be their original ancestor. Marriage is usually forbidden within a clan. Among some tribes, the custom is to regard certain others as *Bandhu* or friendly or related clans; and no marriage takes place between the two. There are other clans from which spouses are chosen according to

prescribed rules. When a clan is described as a friendly or related clan, something like the rules of incest which are applicable in the case of the family is thus extended to a larger unit of organisation.

Clan organisation has much to do with marriage; but it also ensures co-operation between members when economic assistance is needed, or when a death takes place in the house. Among the Juangs of the highlands of Keonjhar in Orissa who practise shifting cultivation, villages are usually inhabited by members of a single clan. But when they adopt the more advanced technique of plough cultivation, changes naturally begin to take place.

In one such village in Dhenkanal visited by the author about a decade ago, it was observed that the lay-out of the new village was after the model of the linear, single-street Oriya village, which is quite different from the loose, irregular agglomeration of Juang villages, as in Gonasika. Many clans had come to live together, as the most economical use had to be made of both cultivable and homestead land. What the Juangs in the Dhenkanal village had done was that in each of the two lines of huts which constituted the village, a number of adjacent huts had been assigned to members of the same clan. When these ended, then began another series of huts, running contiguously to the first, occupied by a second clan. The former distinction between one village and another was thus maintained even when several clans had come to live together in a common village.

It is still more interesting that in each of these clan-sectors, which might not consist of more than 8 or 10 adjacent huts, there was an elder who was obeyed as the headman of his own people. But when a quarrel arose between this whole village and another, a few miles away, over a marriage, the whole of this village of Juangs combined, and forgot for the nonce the differences which lay between the clans residing within their village. Then it was no longer the clan-elders who were followed; leadership belonged to anyone who possessed the necessary qualities.



Clan organisation, among the Juangs, who have taken to plough cultivation has thus been partially modified and in a crisis gives place to territorial unity.

The Munda tribe of Chhotanagpur had a simple kind of political organisation of its own. Two officers, one secular and the other religious, looked after the affairs of the village. There was, moreover, a bigger chief, the Manki, whose jurisdiction extended over a larger territory, and to whom the village chief was subordinate. This arrangement survived for some time even after the land came under the British rule; and then the power of these chiefs got considerably reduced.

It is believed that the Bhumij of the neighbouring district of Manbhum were originally of Munda affiliation. When in the past they came fully under the economic influence of their Hindu neighbours, the upper class among the Bhumij found place in the Hindu society as Kshatriyas. They claimed royal descent and married among neighbouring royal families. In a similar manner, it has been reported by anthropologists from several parts of eastern and middle India that sections of tribal people thus branched off, and established political dominance over their compatriots, and this was done following the model set by the Hindu society. The growth in numbers, and an accentuated contact at many levels with a politically better organised community thus led to developments in tribal society, different from those which had been found sufficient when numbers were small, and distinctions into classes on account of differences in wealth and power were of a feeble nature.

A new series of changes has begun to affect tribal life after extensive political and economic reforms were introduced in India in 1950. But before dealing with some of their results, it is necessary to indicate some of the exceptions to the general trend of events.

It has been consistently the policy of the Government of India to help the tribal communities to develop in accordance with their own genius. In the major part of India, tribal

communities had already come into close economic collaboration with their non-tribal neighbours. But this is not the case with all tribes of Arunachal Pradesh or Nagaland. The Tripuri of Tripura, the Meitei of Manipur, the Kachari or Bodo of Assam, the Bhotia of northern Uttar Pradesh, or the Kanaura of Himachal Pradesh had, for centuries, developed contacts with their Hindu or Buddhist neighbours. But there were many more who remained isolated, located away from the trade routes between India and Tibet, who thus retained a larger proportion of their tribal culture.

After Independence, it became the policy of the Government of India not to hustle them into a faster pace of political change. The Fifth Schedule to the Constitution contains special provisions for the administration and control of the Scheduled Areas in eight States, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan. Under the Sixth Schedule applicable to Assam (North Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts), Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura (Autonomous Hill District), a large measure of autonomy has been vested in District and Regional Councils in the regulation of their economic and social life.<sup>4</sup> The laws of inheritance, the appointment of chiefs, the regulation of marriage, control over shifting cultivation and water resources for the purpose of agriculture, all have been placed under the authority of the two Councils named above, and of which membership is largely by election. As a result, the tribes which have become affiliated to the mainstream of India's political life can yet continue to live under their own social regulations, as long as they wish to do so.

Of course, the Sixth Schedule does not apply to other parts of India. Where tribal people live closely mixed up with others, they are guided by rules to which others also are subject. This is, of course, subject to the exception that the Scheduled Tribes enjoy certain privileges in education,

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix II.



employment, ownership of land or in regard to community development which is not available to the other citizens of India. Yet they are progressively being drawn into an integrated programme of economic development and local self-government through the Panchayati Raj scheme which was introduced in 1959. A significant legislation has been the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (No.40 of 1996) according to which the provisions of Part IV of the Constitution have been extended to the Panchayats in the Scheduled Areas where Gram Sabhas have been vested with important powers.

It is quite true that in the early stages of democratic decentralisation, a larger measure of the benefits would be swept away by communities which are already better organised. But as time passes and as the tribal communities become increasingly conscious of the powers which they enjoy under the Constitution, they will demand a more even distribution of power and wealth. If they now occasionally demand the continuance of special treatment, a larger share of benefits *under the existing social and economic structure*, this can be looked upon as a temporary phenomenon. In time, they will demand, not a specially favoured treatment, but an equality of treatment. And then they will co-operate with other citizens of India in the task of building up a new society wherein every individual will glow with a sense of equality.

What is significant in this connection is that the old political organisation, or the kinds of social structure which they had built up in the past, is being rapidly moulded by the demands of the new. And this is true not only of the tribal peoples of India but also of all citizens who live in the country.

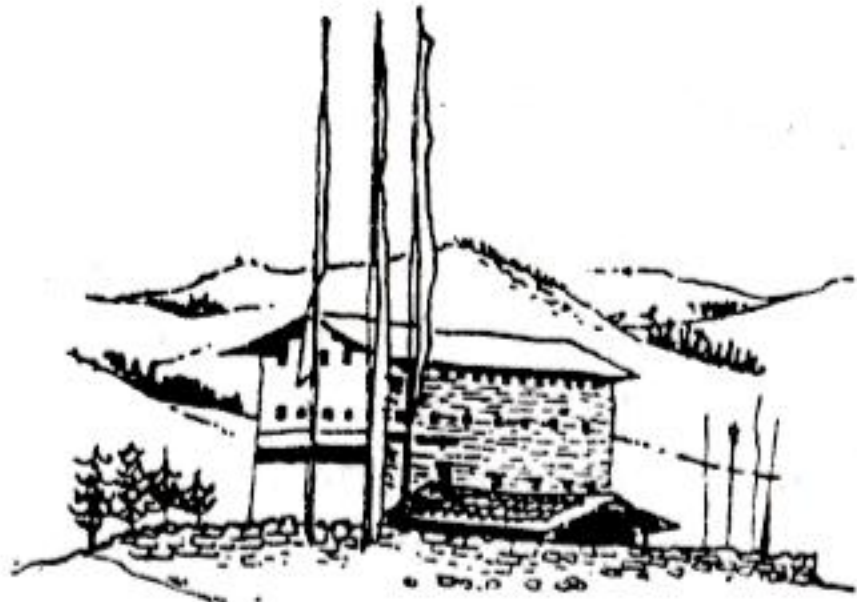
The tribal communities were originally separate from one another, subject to unequal pressure of the Hindu social and economic system. This had even given rise to royal lineages, i.e., *rajas*, princes and *zamindars* from among them. But all such land-owning classes are being liquidated by

the new reforms, whether they are of tribal or of non-tribal origin. In this maelstrom of change, some of the laws of the land have been designed to help the tribal communities to preserve their identity if they so desire. But what is interesting is that adult franchise and the power that comes from numbers, have already been acting upon small tribal communities. They now wish to sink internal differences and present a united 'tribal' front to their more advanced neighbours.

This has been leading the various tribes of Chhotanagpur to unite; and the same thing has happened among the more-than-a-dozen tribes who were known collectively to outsiders as the Nagas, although, among themselves, each small group has a different name. When the demands of political combination thus become strong and urgent, it is natural that social organisation, culture, language and even the distribution of power will continuously go on changing among the communities concerned.

In the present transitional phase of India's political development, it is not necessary that one should portray all the nuances of the evolution through which tribal communities in India are passing. The broad trends have been indicated in outline, and we hope this will suffice for our present purpose.





## RELIGION

It is said that man does not live by bread alone. Nothing can be truer. For there is no community on earth, whether simple or sophisticated, which lives merely by the problems and satisfaction of its everyday life. Each stretches its hands into the past as well as the future, and tries to build up a world-view by weaving its immediate experiences with what it has learnt from the past; to which are added the hopes and fears which it projects into the dimly visible future.

It is quite true that the world-view thus built up by a community does not remain absolutely constant over a long stretch of time; it is constantly revised and re-shaped as its components go on changing. But there are two elements which are practically common to all communities which thus try to build up a spiritual refuge, and from which they derive guidance for their course of action in the affairs of everyday life. One is that the source of knowledge is often something more than what ordinary sense-perception and logical constructs based upon them yield. A large part of that knowledge is derived from poetic imagination, or comes from extra-sensory sources, or what can be termed as revelation.

The belief that revelation gives access to a knowledge which cannot be shared with others, and is unverifiable by the latter unless they place themselves under special mental

or physical conditions, stamps it with a validity or authenticity which is unshakable. Those who gain such knowledge charge it with a high degree of emotional content. There is a firmness in faith which persists even when everyday experiences, or the experiences of history, may run counter to the inferences drawn from the world-view to which one subscribes.

It has widely been held by critical students that reliance upon an emotionally charged world-view, based largely on revelation or poetic imagination, is a way of escaping from the burdens of reality. Religion has also been condemned as an 'opiate' of the masses. There is no reason, however, to think that religious mentality, by which we indicate the phenomenon described above, is necessarily a sedative or an opiate. On the contrary, it may, with equal logic, be the door opening up creative activities of many kinds. There is enough historical evidence to prove that in certain stages of history, when a community was bogged up in the quicksands of immediate experience, reliance upon a world-view, not based merely upon the experiences of the immediate present, helped to spur it on to new activity which eventually led to a clearance from the bondages of the present. The world became re-shaped.

The modern world seems to be passing through a critical phase of that kind, when there seems to be gathering reliance upon a new world-view, not very clearly sighted, but based upon the findings of Science and the morality of Humanism. As one analyses the roots of this reliance, one realises that this eventually springs from one's own inner hopes and desires, as they have arisen from the company of like-minded souls. And faith in it is buttressed by an appeal to History. History is read in such a manner that it supports the hope which one cherishes within. But, logically, there does not seem to be any proof why it should be the business of the Universe to see that Man, and not lowlier organisms, should be victorious in the end. If such a tendency is observable at any particular period of time, it may as well



be due to the determination of Man that he will win and survive, rather than to any commitment of History, or of the Universe, that it shall indeed be so.

The reason why this general statement has been made about the nature of religious belief is that the common features enumerated above are present as much in the simplest beliefs and practices of tribal people as they are among the civilised. Does this, therefore, mean that there are no differences? Indeed there are. But the excellence of one in comparison with another is often decided on pragmatic grounds, which are not always logically valid.

For instance, if the religion of one group of people leads them to consider only people of their own faith as brothers, and others as less so, then the faith which results in such narrowness is considered to be inferior to another in which its adherents are led to consider all men as brothers, irrespective of the faiths which they may profess. There have been saints in India, as well as in every other country, whose love encompassed not only friends and foes alike, but even birds and animals, trees and plants—in fact, all living beings. Pragmatically, such a faith is reasonably considered to be superior to another where sympathy or love is of a more limited kind.

Whether the scale described above for measuring the excellence of one faith over another is logically valid or not is a different and difficult question. For the choice of the measure itself may arise from one's personal commitments, i.e., from one's own hopes and fears. This is the reason why in any treatment of tribal beliefs and practices, it would be useful to shed personal prejudices, or at least keep judgement in suspense. One should remember the wise saying in the *Bhagavadgita*, where Srikrishna says that any form of worship is acceptable to Him if it springs from true *shraddha*, no matter whether the offering is only a flower or a drop of water. We shall, therefore, refrain from passing any judgement on tribal forms of religion in India, and only describe some of their broader characteristics as well as the

changes to which they have been subject in modern times.

One of the universal features of tribal faiths in India is that all beings are supposed to be endowed with a living spirit. Animals and plants, rivers and mountains are no exception to this rule. The dead who have apparently left us are yet with us; and it is through remembrance and offerings that we have to renew our relationship with them on due occasions. The dead are reborn in the shape of offspring in the present generation. The span of man's comradeship is thus extended to encompass all that he sees around him, as well as those whom he loved and has apparently lost.

What is significant in the tribal religion, or 'animistic' beliefs of our brethren, the Mundas, the Oraons or the Santals, is that the whole world, peopled by spirits, is thus rendered holy. In the forests where some of the more isolated communities live, a few trees are never touched or cut, for they represent the primal grove. They are symbolic of the whole forest which men, under the pressure of needs, have had to cut down. The mountains are holy; and there are rocks of extraordinary shape, or even colours, which are taken as proofs of their sacredness.

If the spirits dwell everywhere, and if all are at peace with them, men enjoy freedom from illness and a long life. If anyone falls ill, the general belief is that some relationship has been violated; when, by means of trances or particular magical ceremonies, men or women skilled in the art decide what should be done by the sufferers. And when this is done, health is once again believed to be restored.

Among more sophisticated communities, certain places, probably enclosed by a wall and covered by a roof, are marked off as specially sacred. But among the 'animistic' tribes of India, all places are holy as they are the seats of spirits. Some have accused the so-called animists of living in perpetual fear of ghosts and spirits. But there does not seem to be any particular justification for this. All men have their hopes and fears, and to single out a few elements of tribal religions and say that the latter are born only of fear



would be a grave injustice to them.

A faith which establishes man's kinship with all that he sees around him, a faith which releases some of the creative forces within him, which burst forth in simple, loving ceremonies or occasionally in beautiful, lyrical poems or songs, or in art which is direct, and not trammelled by sophistication, can hardly be accused of being barren and destructive in its influence upon the human spirit.

If we accuse the Nagas of once having been head-hunters, or the Kandhs because they believed in offering a human sacrifice to the Goddess of the Earth in the hope of a fuller harvest, how then are we to regard those civilised communities which regard it as a necessary and holy task to engage in the wholesale slaughter of thousands upon thousands of men for the protection of the interests of a 'nation' or of a particular 'class'? If the religion of the tribal people is corrupted by superstition, have we the right to throw the first stone at them? Each seems to have its own logic and is apparently satisfied with it. The *actual* life of all communities, whether savage or civilised, is guided by numerous superstitions, although some of them may profess higher forms of faith on some days in the year, or in particular places sheltered off from the unholy.

Our intention is not to prove that tribal people are better than civilised people. We are all tarred by the same brush. So, when we compare our own world-views with those of simpler folk, let us do so with greater humility, for that alone can give us a deeper understanding of their faith as well as of our own.

There is one thing which has happened to tribal folk after their contact with men of other faiths. It is true that these tribes are poor, devoid of formal education, and oppressed by fears which arise out of lack of modern knowledge. But in this respect they suffer from disabilities similar to those to which the poorer classes among the non-tribal people are also subject. Christian missionaries have worked upon these for more than a century; firstly, because

they are more trusting, and secondly, in this respect they offer a more fertile field for developing a truly religious life than the nominally Christian and poverty-stricken classes in countries from which the missionaries themselves come. For many missionaries, work in their home-country is less rewarding than work among the simpler and more responsive inhabitants of tribal India.

Christianity has undoubtedly brought the message of a richer life, a wider companionship and a new sense of dignity to converts. But it is interesting that the Christian religion has always been attended by the benefits of modern western civilisation. And this was particularly so during the period of the British rule when the converts felt closer to the British rulers than to their benighted countrymen. The western way of life spread among those who could afford to do so, while education improved habits of living and reliance upon modern medicine got introduced wherever Christianity was able to enter. Yet it might be worthwhile asking whether Christianity and westernisation in India were necessarily identical with each other. Perhaps they are not. For there can be a Christian religion which does not necessarily draw men and women away from their own civilisation. Yet, up to now, the principal agent of westernisation, often regarded as modernisation, among the tribal folk has been Christian missionary enterprise. It is only after Independence that Christianity has been swinging round to a point of view when allegiance to one's native culture is being encouraged.

Obviously, the relation of tribal folk to Hinduism or Christianity has been quite different. For, at least, Hinduism has not been a proselytising religion. The indigenous population of India is supposed to have contributed in the past generously to the building up of what is known as Hinduism. The tribes retained the principal elements of their faith and practice, though these were modified to a greater or less extent. In addition, they shared some of the gods and goddesses, and even participated in the social festivals and



ceremonies of their Brahmanical neighbours, without any effort on the part of the latter for conversion. That participation did not turn them into Hindus. One might indeed say that tribes can be regarded as being fully absorbed in the Hindu fold if Brahman priests perform Brahmanical ceremonies for them during the three critical events of birth, marriage and death. If the latter are still celebrated by tribal rituals, then the communities are still true to their own faith in spite of the fact that in the outer fringes of their culture, they participate in some of the ceremonies of their Hindu neighbours.

A parallel might be drawn from the example of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India in the past. Even now there are a large number of shrines dedicated to Muslim saints in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan where both Hindu and Muslim devotees offer prayers without any detriment to their religious affiliation. In the past and not so very long ago, Muslims used to join in the celebration of the spring festival called Holi. And Hindus, in a similar manner, used to play a prominent part in the performance of the Muharram by carrying the *tazia*, or by an exhibition of their skill in play with the *lathi* or quarter-staff. Such participation was largely in common festivities, i.e., on a social plane, and did not mean that one community had adopted the faith of another.

The relationship of many tribal communities to either Hinduism or Buddhism is of this nature unless they have been very deeply drawn into the Hindu social system. In Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, or among the Monpas of Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh, many of the Scheduled Tribes, i.e., those who have been listed for special treatment under the Constitution, have thus come very close to either Hinduism or Buddhism, or to both. Yet they have retained a custom like polyandry which marks them off from the rest of their neighbours.

A very interesting example of the simultaneous existence of several cultures was discovered by a young

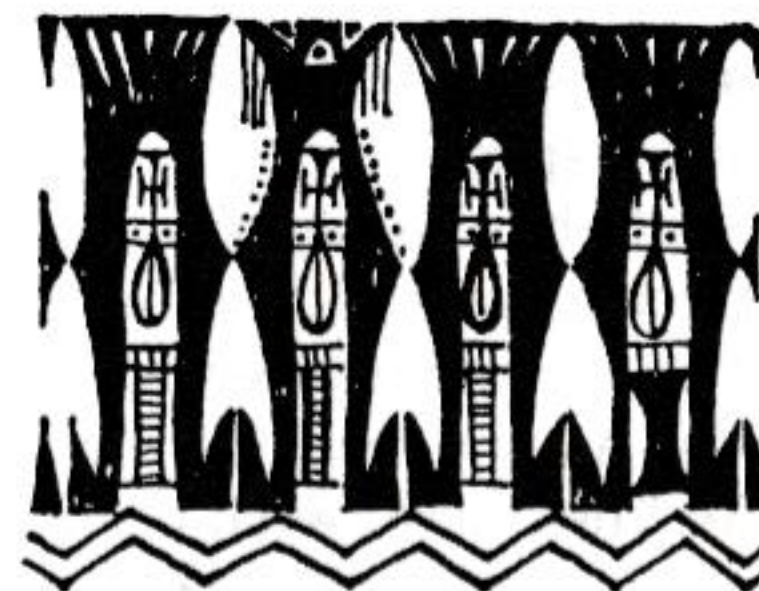
anthropologist named Dr. Annada Bhagabati of the University of Gauhati. He discovered in the foothills of the Himalayas a place where Buddhist mountaineers come down with various goods to meet a Hinduised tribe which gathers there from the plains. The fair lasts for nearly a month when large quantities of merchandise are bought and sold. But before the trade formally begins, there is a large outcrop of rock which is worshipped by both communities. The mountain tribe makes offerings to it in accordance with Tibetan rituals as the seat of the Buddha or Bodhisatva, and the tribe from the plains worships the same rock as an embodiment of Siva. And then the trade formally begins and is carried on according to certain customary rules.

It is significant that, in this way, two tribes who might otherwise be regarded as Buddhist and Hindu respectively, still continue some of their ancient tribal customs. Both religions seem to sit lightly upon them; what is dominant is their own indigenous culture. The crucial point is that, at least, the plains tribal people are not served, as far as is known, by Brahman priests. They have their own priests, and the ceremonies are also their own. Even if such people call themselves Hindu, no other Hindu objects, for Hinduism is spread over a wide spectrum encompassing tribal beliefs at one end and the highest forms of philosophical freedom at the other. Hindu society has, moreover, a built-in arrangement, the caste system, by means of which communities can preserve their distinctive identities, even when they are federated in common hierarchical system. The change that takes place under the influence of Christianity or Islam, both religions of Semitic origin, is, however, of a different order. For a man cannot become a Christian or Muslim merely if he claims to be one.

After Independence, when tribes listed in a schedule under the Constitution, have gained access to certain statutory benefits, a new movement has started among even the westernised converts to Christianity to rediscover and



reaffirm their tribal identity and separateness from those who are not included in the schedule. There is nothing wrong in such an endeavour. But while describing the religions of the tribal communities in India, we have to indicate not only the character of their indigenous faiths and practices but also the many-sided changes to which they have been subject through the contact and influence of their more prosperous neighbours. Sometimes there has been a slow drift towards Hinduism. Sometimes they have been attracted towards westernism through the devoted help of western missionaries. And now a new trend has begun among them of a new unification between Christian and non-Christian or 'animist', so that their 'tribal' identity may be reaffirmed, and in the process, a salvage takes place of as much of their tribal culture and religious faith as is consistent with the demands of modern life.



## ART, MUSIC AND DANCE

Many of the songs of tribal communities of India as well as their folk-tales have been published by anthropologists. Sarat Chandra Roy, who was one of the earliest among them, presented a number of Mundari songs, along with their English translations, in his book entitled *The Mundas and their Country* in 1912. Two of them are given below, along with a third from a different source, as examples of the high lyrical quality of these poems.

Like *kunduru*\* winding round the tree, thou girl,  
 Infold'st me in thy loving coils,  
 Like *kunduru* clasping round the tree, my girl,  
 Thou hold'st me close in thy tender toils,  
 As *p'landu* creeper round the tree, my love,  
 Around my heart so dost thou twine.  
 As *p'landu* twists around the tree, my love  
 So hast thou bound my heart in thine.  
 My heart feels warm, O come along, my love,  
 O come with me my *kunduru*, dear,  
 O come with me, and thus through life,  
 We both will move together here.  
 In thee my heart in bliss doth rest,\*\*

\* *Kunduru* and *Palandu* are names of creepers.

\*\* Literally, the original would be translated thus : 'As the heart became cool' (i.e., filled with calm and delight).



Together will we run life's race,  
O come, *p'landu*, come together thus,  
We'll stride across life's narrow pace.

To such a pair the rest of the world has no significance. They ask for nothing in the universe save each other's company. Fear and anxiety these young lovers have none. The slightest attempt to check the natural bent of their affections they forthwith resent. And hear with what obstinacy one of these unruly Munda youths hurls defiance at all social restrictions:

O! none of your ugly matchmakers I need!  
Do send them away with your *kerketa* and crow  
For a bride I shall look where affection will bid,  
My wishes alone the sole mentor I know,  
O! none of your gaudy *chaudols* will I need,  
No clanking musicians behind me will go!  
For a bride I shall seek where affection will lead,  
My wishes alone the sole guide that I know,  
No sprinkling of water with mango-twigs I'll need,  
Nor mark of vermilion over my brow  
For a bride I shall look where affection will bid,  
My wishes alone the sole mentor I know.

(Roy 1912: 515-16)

A third song from another source records a sentiment which is of a different kind:

My love, you used to issue from your hut  
Like a fresh bloom, as beautiful as the wings  
Of a peacock. But, my love, why is it that  
You are now like a faded bloom, like the peacock's  
Feather which has lost its glory?

The girl replies :

My friend, the Sun has not scorched  
My beauty, nor the Earth. Youth has  
Passed away and left me without the bloom  
Which belonged to me yesterday.

Poems of this nature are not recited but always sung; and the feelings and sentiments which they express, as well

as the dances which accompany them, help to add a touch of beauty to the plain joys and sorrows of existence. The artistic taste of the tribal folk also finds expression in decoration of their houses, in the clothes they weave and wear, as well as in the simple ornaments with which they decorate their bodies. Tattooing is popular among them. They wear few clothes; therefore, the body is decorated permanently with designs of many kinds. The colour with which textiles are dyed are of indigenous origin. There is nothing subdued in them; designs offer strong contrasts, and the range of colours is also limited. Red and yellow, blue and green, and a deep black are often their favourites and the designs which are produced on the loom or by embroidery are often of geometrical shape. Even when simple garlands are strung from seeds and beads, or when a bunch of flowers is stuck in the coiffure the colours are strong and match admirably the warm colour of the skin or that of the textiles which are worn during ceremonial dances.

The examples which have been given above do not, however, exhaust the artistic resources of India's tribal folk. There is another field in which art becomes interwoven with religion or, as one may say, the distinction which is usually drawn between the sacred and the secular by more sophisticated people ceases to exist. As has been said already, the religious experience of the tribal people depends, not so much upon everyday experiences and logical constructs based upon them as on dreams, visions and revelations which arise from the deeper springs of their being. The source of artistic experience also perhaps lies in the same region; and, therefore, when there is complete abandon to the experiences which spring from such a source, both Art and Religion tend to fuse with each other into a unified whole.

Almost all forms of tribal religion demand that offerings should be made to spirits, and these may take the shape of animals like elephants and bulls, horses and pigs. Figures



are in terracotta and produced by priestly craftsmen, who are members of the same tribe. Occasionally they are carved out of wood, or of brass, worked by the archaic lost-wax process. Human figures, or figures of gods and goddesses, are comparatively rare. Where masked dances are in vogue, the masks may represent the face of some god or even that of a demon.

What is significant about all these figures, whether carved in wood or made of burnt earth, is that there is no attempt to imitate what exists in nature. A horse or a bull, the vision of a god or of a demon, impresses tribal folk with perhaps one central quality. And all that the artist tries to do, whether he is a layman or a priest, is to reproduce that central quality without any embellishment which would make it more 'realistic'. It is this elemental quality in primitive art which impresses us most. The artist is not ashamed of what might be regarded by others as 'crude'. He remains true to the impression which an object has produced upon him, and tries to reproduce it faithfully. It is this utter concentration upon the *true nature* of an object which raises tribal art far above the level of the more sophisticated art of the civilised. It has been rightly said that the tribal artist may be 'untutored, but he is not uninitiated.'

Human figures are rarely carved. But when they are, they are in memory of someone who was loved, but is no more. There is no attempt even in such examples to reproduce with fidelity any of the features of the departed. The figure of a woman, carved more or less in the rough, is enough to remind the brother, who was responsible for its execution, of the dear sister whom he loved and who has left him. Such objects are not for everybody; each one of them has an appeal for the one who alone is concerned.

It is significant that offerings like the above, or of terracotta animals and the like, of lampstands made of the same material, are all placed not inside a walled temple, but

in the open, under some tree or a group of trees. Year after year, the figures go on piling; and they may strike an outsider by the monotony of their form, or by lack of any arrangement among the offerings. But these are no more than tokens of memory, the symbol or seal of an experience through which one has passed.

Even in the music and dances of the tribal folk of India, the notes which are employed are of a limited range, while there is no end of repetition of the same rhythm or of the same movement from hour to hour. There are no specialists; and every man, woman and child participates with abandon both in singing and in dancing. It is everybody's dance; for these are things which one enjoys not by watching others perform, but by joining in it oneself, and by temporising from moment to moment.

As such, tribal art is everyone's art. It enriches the daily life of those who share in it. And if the simplicity and monotony of daily life, which is often at the level of want, spills over into artistic expressions also, whether in the field of music, dance or sculpture, there seems to be nothing wrong about it.

Nearly forty years ago, there was an occasion when I had camped for a few weeks among the Juangs, who were then considered to be one of the most primitive tribes of India. The Juangs, in that particular village, were miserably poor; but I remember one moonlit night, when the sky was glorious, they went on dancing until day broke, and one by one they left the dancing ground near the youths' dormitory for attending to their daily chores. The small hamlet was situated in a valley deep within high mountains, and all through the night, the sound of drums and the simple notes which they sang went on reverberating deeply between the mountain walls.

In the morning, I asked one of them how they could pass the whole night without sleep and spend it in dancing and singing. An elderly Juang replied, "We have enough sorrows all through the day. Why should we waste the night



also in brooding over those sorrows?" It was a wise statement, and I believe that it is in this way that the tribal people of India conquer the sorrows of daily life by discovering their own souls in the depth of religious and artistic experiences.



## Appendix I

### List of the Scheduled Tribes of India

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of the tribe</i>	<i>States/UTs in which they live</i>
1.	Abor	Arunachal Pradesh
2.	Adiyan	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
3.	Agariya	Madhya Pradesh
4.	Aimol	Manipur
5.	Aka	Arunachal Pradesh
6.	Anal	Manipur
7.	Andamanese	Andaman & Nicobar Islands (12)
8.	Andh	Andhra Pradesh (1), Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
9.	Apatani	Arunachal Pradesh
10.	Arandan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
11.	Asur	Bihar (1), West Bengal
12.	Bagata	Andhra Pradesh, Orissa
13.	Baiga	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal
14.	Bakarwal	Jammu & Kashmir
15.	Balti	Jammu & Kashmir
16.	Banjara	Andhra Pradesh (2), Bihar, Orissa (1)
17.	Barda	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra



18.	Barman	Assam
19.	Bathudi	Bihar, Orissa
20.	Bavacha, Bamcha	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra
21.	Beda	Jammu & Kashmir
22.	Bedia	Bihar, West Bengal (also Bediya)
23.	Bhaina	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
24.	Bharia Bhumia	Madhya Pradesh (5), Maharashtra (2)
25.	Bharwad	Gujarat
26.	Bhattra	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
27.	Bhil	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat (12), Karnataka (12), Madhya Pradesh (3), Maharashtra (12), Rajasthan (12), Tripura
28.	Bhil Mina	Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan
29.	Bhot, Bodh	Himachal Pradesh
30.	Bhottada, Dhotada	Orissa
31.	Bhuiya, Bhuyan	Orissa
32.	Bhumia	Orissa
33.	Bhumij	Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal
34.	Bhunja	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa
35.	Bhutia	Sikkim (8), Tripura, Uttar Pradesh (Bhotia), West Bengal (6)
36.	Biar, Biyar	Madhya Pradesh
37.	Binjhal	Orissa
38.	Binjhia	Bihar, Orissa (1)
39.	Binjhar	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
40.	Birhor	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (also Birhul), Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal
41.	Birjia	Bihar, West Bengal
42.	Bondo Poraja	Orissa
43.	Boro, Borokachari	Assam, Meghalaya (only Borokachari)
44.	Bot, Boto	Jammu & Kashmir

45.	Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shin	Jammu & Kashmir
46.	Buksa	Uttar Pradesh
47.	Chaimal	Tripura
48.	Chakma	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, West Bengal
49.	Changpa	Jammu & Kashmir
50.	Charan	Gujarat
51.	Chaudhri	Gujarat
52.	Chenchu	Andhra Pradesh (1), Karnataka (1), Orissa
53.	Chero	Bihar, West Bengal
54.	Chik Baraik	Bihar, West Bengal
55.	Chiru	Manipur
56.	Chodhara	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra
57.	Chothe	Manipur
58.	Dafla	Arunachal Pradesh
59.	Dal	Orissa
60.	Damor, Damaria	Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan
61.	Deori	Assam
62.	Desua Bhumij	Orissa
63.	Dhanka	Gujarat (3), Maharashtra (3), Rajasthan (3)
64.	Dhanwar	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
65.	Dharua	Orissa
66.	Dhodia	Goa, Gujarat (1), Maharashtra, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu
67.	Didayi	Orissa
68.	Dimasa, Kachari	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland (only Kachari)
69.	Dubla	Goa (1), Gujarat (2), Karnataka (2), Maharashtra (2), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (1), Daman & Diu (1)



70.	Eravallan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
71.	Gadaba	Andhra Pradesh (6), Madhya Pradesh (1), Orissa
72.	Gaddi	Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir
73.	Galong	Arunachal Pradesh
74.	Gamit	Gujarat (4), Karnataka (5), Maharashtra (4)
75.	Gandia	Orissa
76.	Gangte	Manipur
77.	Garasia	Rajasthan
78.	Garos	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura (Garoo), West Bengal Jammu & Kashmir
79.	Garra	Orissa
80.	Ghara	Andhra Pradesh (3), Bihar, Gujarat (1), Karnataka (2), Madhya Pradesh (55), Maharashtra (55), Orissa (1), West Bengal
82.	Gorait	Bihar, West Bengal
83.	Goudu	Andhra Pradesh
84.	Gowdalu	Karnataka
85.	Gujjar	Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir
86.	Hajong	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, West Bengal (Hajang)
87.	Hakkipikki	Karnataka
88.	Halam	Tripura
89.	Halba, Halbi	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
90.	Hasalaru	Karnataka
91.	Hill Pulaya	Kerala
92.	Hmar	Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram
93.	Ho	Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal
94.	Hojai	Assam
95.	Holva	Orissa

96.	Inhabitants of Lakshadweep	Lakshadweep (who, and both of whose parents, were born in the UT)
97.	Irular	Karnataka, Kerala (1), Tamil Nadu
98.	Iruliga	Karnataka
99.	Jad	Himachal Pradesh (2)
100.	Jamatia	Tripura
101.	Jarawa	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
102.	Jatapu	Andhra Pradesh, Orissa
103.	Jaunsari	Uttar Pradesh
104.	Jenu Kuruba	Karnataka
105.	Juang	Orissa
106.	Kachari	Assam (1), Nagaland
107.	Kadar	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
108.	Kadu Kuruba	Karnataka
109.	Kamar	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra
110.	Kammara	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
111.	Kanaura, Kinnara	Himachal Pradesh
112.	Kandha Gauda	Orissa
113.	Kanikaran, Kanikkar	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
114.	Kaniyan, Kanyan	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
115.	Kanwar	Madhya Pradesh (6), Maharashtra (6), Orissa
116.	Karku	Madhya Pradesh
117.	Karmali	Bihar, West Bengal
118.	Kathodi	Gujarat (5), Karnataka (5), Maharashtra (5), Rajasthan (5), Dadra & Nagar Haveli
119.	Kattunayakan	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
120.	Keer	Madhya Pradesh
121.	Khairwar	Madhya Pradesh (1), Maharashtra
122.	Khampti	Arunachal Pradesh
123.	Kharia	Bihar (3), Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa (1)



124.	Kharwar	Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal
125.	Khasi	Assam (6), Meghalaya (6), Mizoram (6), Tripura (Khasia)
126.	Khoa	Arunachal Pradesh
127.	Kisan	Bihar (1), Orissa, West Bengal
128.	Koch	Meghalaya
129.	Kochu Velan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
130.	Koirao	Manipur
131.	Koireng	Manipur
132.	Kokna	Gujarat (2), Karnataka (2), Maharashtra (2), Rajasthan (2), Dadra & Nagar Haveli
133.	Kol	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa
134.	Kolah Lohara, Kol Lohara	Orissa
135.	Kolam	Andhra Pradesh (2), Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra (1)
136.	Kolha	Orissa
137.	Koli	Gujarat
138.	Koli, Malhar	Orissa
139.	Koli Dhor	Gujarat (3), Karnataka (3), Maharashtra (3), Rajasthan (3), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (1)
140.	Koli Mahadev, Dongar Koli	Maharashtra
141.	Koli Malhar	Manipur
142.	Kom	Andhra Pradesh, Orissa
143.	Konda Dhora	(Kondadora)
144.	Konda Kapu	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
145.	Kondareddi	Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
146.	Kondh	Andhra Pradesh (8), Bihar (Khond), Madhya Pradesh (2), Maharashtra (2), Orissa (5), West Bengal (Khond)
147.	Kora	Bihar (1), Orissa, West Bengal
148.	Koraga	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu

149.	Korku	Madhya Pradesh (6), Maharashtra (6)
150.	Korua	Orissa
151.	Korwa	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (1), West Bengal
152.	Kota	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
153.	Kotia	Andhra Pradesh (9), Orissa
154.	Koya	Andhra Pradesh (13), Karnata- ka (2), Maharashtra (2), Orissa
155.	Kudiya, Melakudi	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
156.	Kuki tribes	Assam (37), Meghalaya (37), Mizoram (37), Nagaland, Tripura (17)
157.	Kulia	Andhra Pradesh
158.	Kulis	Orissa
159.	Kunbi	Gujarat
160.	Kurichchan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
161.	Kuruba	Karnataka
162.	Kuruman	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
163.	Kurumba	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
164.	Lahaula	Himachal Pradesh
165.	Lakher	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram
166.	Lalung	Assam
167.	Lamgang	Manipur
168.	Lepcha	Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal
169.	Lodha	Orissa, West Bengal (2)
170.	Lohara, Lohra	Bihar (2), West Bengal (2)
171.	Mag	Tripura
172.	Magh	West Bengal
173.	Mahali	Orissa, West Bengal
174.	Mahli	Bihar, West Bengal
175.	Maha Malasar	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
176.	Majhi	Madhya Pradesh
177.	Majhwar	Madhya Pradesh
178.	Malai Arayan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
179.	Malaikudi	Karnataka
180.	Malai Pandaram	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
181.	Malai Vedan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu



182.	Malakkuravan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
183.	Malasar	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
184.	Malayali	Tamil Nadu
185.	Malayan	Kerala
186.	Malayarayar	Kerala
187.	Malayekandi	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
188.	Maleru	Karnataka
189.	Mali	Andhra Pradesh
190.	Mal Paharia	Bihar (1), West Bengal (Mal Pahariya)
191.	Man (Tai speaking)	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram
192.	Mankidi	Orissa
193.	Mankirdia	Orissa
194.	Manna Dhora	Andhra Pradesh
195.	Mannan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
196.	Mao	Manipur
197.	Maram	Manipur
198.	Maratha	Karnataka
199.	Marati	Karnataka, Kerala
200.	Maring	Manipur
201.	Matya	Orissa
202.	Mawasi	Madhya Pradesh
203.	Mech	Assam, West Bengal
204.	Meda	Karnataka
205.	Mikir	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland
206.	Mina	Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan
207.	Mirdha	Orissa
208.	Miri	Assam
209.	Mishmi	Arunachal Pradesh
210.	Mizo (Lushai) tribes	Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura
211.	Momba	Arunachal Pradesh
212.	Mon	Jammu & Kashmir
213.	Monsang	Manipur
214.	Moyon	Manipur
215.	Mru	West Bengal
216.	Mudugar, Muduvan	Tamil Nadu
217.	Mukha Dhora, Nooka Dhora	Andhra Pradesh

218.	Munda	Bihar (1), Madhya Pradesh, Orissa (3), Tripura (1), West Bengal
219.	Mundari	Orissa
220.	Muthuvan	Kerala (2), Tamil Nadu
221.	Naga tribes	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur (5), Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland
222.	Nagesia	Madhya Pradesh (1), Maharashtra (1), West Bengal
223.	Naikda	Goa (1), Gujarat (5), Karnataka (9), Maharashtra (5), Rajasthan (5), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (1), Daman & Diu (1)
224.	Nayak	Andhra Pradesh
225.	Nicobarese	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
226.	Noatia	Tripura
227.	Omanatya	Orissa
228.	Onge	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
229.	Oraon	Bihar (1), Madhya Pradesh (2), Maharashtra (1), Orissa, Tripura (Orang), West Bengal
230.	Padhar	Gujarat
231.	Paite	Manipur
232.	Palleyan	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
233.	Palliyan	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
234.	Palliyar	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
235.	Pangwala	Himachal Pradesh
236.	Panika	Madhya Pradesh
237.	Paniyan	Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
238.	Pao	Madhya Pradesh
239.	Paradhi	Gujarat
240.	Pardhan	Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh (2), Maharashtra (2)
241.	Pardhi	Gujarat (2), Karnataka (2), Madhya Pradesh (8), Maharashtra (10)



242.	Parenga	Orissa
243.	Parhaiya	Bihar, West Bengal
244.	Parja	Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa (Paroja)
245.	Patelia	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan
246.	Pawi	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram
247.	Pentia	Orissa
248.	Pomla	Gujarat, Maharashtra
249.	Porja, Parangiperja	Andhra Pradesh
250.	Purigpa	Jammu & Kashmir
251.	Purum	Manipur
252.	Rabari	Gujarat
253.	Rabha	Assam, Meghalaya (Raba, Rava), West Bengal
254.	Raji	Uttar Pradesh
255.	Rajuar	Orissa
256.	Ralte	Manipur
257.	Rathawa	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra
258.	Reddi Dhora	Andhra Pradesh
259.	Riang	Tripura
260.	Rona, Rena	Andhra Pradesh
261.	Sahariya, Seharua	Madhya Pradesh (5), Rajasthan (2)
262.	Santal	Bihar, Orissa, Tripura, West Bengal
263.	Saonta, Saunta	Madhya Pradesh
264.	Saur	Madhya Pradesh
265.	Sauria Paharia	Bihar, West Bengal
266.	Savara	Andhra Pradesh (3), Bihar (Savar), Madhya Pradesh (Sawar, Sawara), Maharashtra (Sawar, Sawara), Orissa (Saora, Savar, Saura, Sahara), West Bengal (Savar)

267.	Sentinelese	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
268.	Shabar, Lodha	Orissa
269.	Sherdukpen	Arunachal Pradesh
270.	Sholaga	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
271.	Shompen	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
272.	Siddi	Goa (1), Gujarat (1), Daman & Diu (1)
273.	Simte	Manipur
274.	Singpho	Arunachal Pradesh
275.	Sippi	Jammu & Kashmir
276.	Soligaru	Karnataka
277.	Sonr	Madhya Pradesh
278.	Sounti	Orissa
279.	Suhte	Manipur
280.	Swangla	Himachal Pradesh
281.	Synteng	Assam (Syntheng), Meghalaya, Mizoram
282.	Thadou	Manipur
283.	Thakur, Thakar	Maharashtra (5)
284.	Tharu	Uttar Pradesh
285.	Tharua	Orissa
286.	Thoti	Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra
287.	Toda	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
288.	Tripura, Tripuri, Tippera	Tripura
289.	Uchai	Tripura
290.	Ulladan	Kerala
291.	Uraly	Kerala, Tamil Nadu
292.	Vaghri	Gujarat (1)
293.	Vaiphui	Manipur
294.	Valmiki	Andhra Pradesh
295.	Varli	Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu



296.	Vitola, Kotwalia, Barodia	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra
297.	Yenadi	Andhra Pradesh (4)
298.	Yerava	Karnataka
299.	Yerukula	Andhra Pradesh (4)
300.	Zou	Manipur

(Compiled and collated by Shri C.B. Tripathi)

**Note :**

1. A tribe shown against any particular State may not necessarily be found in the entire State. In some cases there are area restrictions.
2. For the purpose of this statement various sub-tribes/synonyms under one entry in the official list have been shown as one tribe. For example, the official list of Nagaland has a single entry as all Naga tribes. Though the official list does not mention the major 16 Naga tribes, all of them have been shown as one entry in this statement too. In some cases one or two Naga tribes have been shown in the official list. For instance, Angami in Manipur list. In this statement Angami is not shown as an independent entry but has been included in the entry captioned Naga tribes. The official lists of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have an entry of Gond. This entry contains the names of 55 sub-tribes. But in this statement those 55 sub-tribes have not been shown as independent tribes and instead their generic name, i.e., Gond, only has been included.
3. Figures within brackets against each State/UT indicate the number of synonyms/sub-tribes

## Appendix II

### Explanatory Notes

Note No.	Note
1.	<p>The figure in the original book was given as 29,879,249 based on 1961 Census. The Scheduled Tribe population of India rose to 3,80,15,162 in 1971 (decennial growth rate 27.23%). During the decade, lists of the Scheduled Tribes were promulgated by the President in respect of Dadra &amp; Nagar Haveli (30-6-1962), Uttar Pradesh (24-6-1967), Goa, Daman &amp; Diu (12-1-1968) and Nagaland (23-7-1970).</p> <p>The Scheduled Tribe population of the country rose to 5,38,14,483 in 1981 (decennial growth rate 41.56%). This abnormal increase was on account of the amendment in the lists of the Scheduled Tribes in 1976 removing area restrictions. During the decade, the list of the Scheduled Tribes was promulgated by the President in respect of Sikkim (22-6-1978).</p> <p>The Scheduled Tribe population of India further rose to 6,77,58,380 in 1991 (decennial growth rate 25.91%). During the decade, the list of the Scheduled Tribes was promulgated by the President in respect of Jammu &amp; Kashmir (7-10-1989) and some communities were added to the lists of ST in some States. In 1991, Census was not held in J &amp; K.</p> <p>The percentage of the Scheduled Tribe population in the country's population increased from 6.94% in</p>



1971 to 7.85% in 1981 to 8.08% in 1991.

2. The major languages mentioned in the original book were Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Oriya, Tamil and Telugu. The six languages now included are in the order of the number of speakers of the respective languages in 1991 Census — Hindi (337,272,114), Bengali (69,595,738), Telugu (66,017,615), Marathi (62,481,681), Tamil (53,006,368) and Urdu (43,406,932).
3. The figure of 300 in terms of the number of the Scheduled Tribes in the country has been arrived at by arranging all the Scheduled Tribes in the alphabetical order, indicating the States/UTs in which (either throughout the State or in a part of it) a particular tribe is found (Appendix I). Nagaland has 16 tribes but since these have not been enumerated in the official list and only the name Naga is mentioned, all Naga tribes have been counted as one. The same is the case with Kukis. In Mizoram, 32 tribes have been shown as Kuki tribes, but for the purpose of the All-India list all Kuki tribes have been counted as one. Similarly, the Gond in Madhya Pradesh at S.No.16 has the names of 52 sub-tribes, but for the present purpose, these have been counted as one. This accounts for the appreciable difference between the figure in the original book (427) and that given now in the revised edition.
4. After the first sentence in this paragraph, the original book reads as follows: "Schedules Five and Six of the Constitution guarantee to the scheduled area of Assam a far greater measure of autonomy than that enjoyed by other citizens of India. Under the Sixth Schedule....." There are no Scheduled Areas in Assam. The Tribal Areas under Schedule VI were known as Excluded Areas in the pre-Independence period. The Scheduled Areas under Schedule V were then known as Partially Excluded Areas.

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